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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sidney Kosasa (SK)

Honolulu, Hawai'i

August 30, 2001

BY: Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Sidney Kosasa at his office in Kaka'ako, O'ahu. And today is August 30, 2001, and the interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto.

MK: So Mr. Kosasa, the first question I have for you today is when and where were you born?

SK: I was born in Pālolo Valley, and I think the store was 1425 10th Avenue. That's the store. You can see a picture here. That was the store and I was born upstairs of that store, 1425 10th Avenue.

MK: And when were you born?

SK: I was born on December 20, 1919. My parents [Morita Kosasa and Mitsue Ito Kosasa] already had the grocery store. So it was hard for her [SK's mother, Mitsue Kosasa]. You know, Christmastime and my mother gave birth to me. It was kind of a busy period. She didn't say she had a hard time, but I know it was rough because we opened seven days a week. I remember from six-thirty to about ten o'clock at night, we open the store, so it was long hours.

MK: And then in your family, what number child are you?

SK: We only had two in our family, my older brother and myself. Neil. He was born on May 9, 1918.

WN: So you folks were pretty close. Close in age.

SK: Yes, about a year and a half apart. So only two of us. My mother couldn't have any more children after she gave birth to me, I guess. So, we only had two.

MK: And what was your father's name?

SK: Morita, and my mother's name was Mitsue. Her maiden name was Ito. And Morita Kosasa, originally, in Japan, if you read a Japanese character, it's Ozasa. *Ko* is [read] *o*, too. And this is *sasa*. So in Japan, my father's parents' name was Ozasa. When we opened the grocery store, I think that my father had a hard time in spelling Ozasa. So I remember we started out with the name Kozasa, K-O-Z. Then finally [when I was in] elementary school they changed it over to Kosasa. And that's the way. But my cousins,

(and everyone else) in Japan is still Ozasa. So the character is Ozasa. So sometimes in Japanese[-language] school, they say, Ozasa. But it was Kosasa Store. I guess for the business, easier for the *Haoles* to know Kosasa, instead of Kozasa or Ozasa. That's why we changed it. If you look in the telephone directory, the only Kosasa is actually my sister-in-law and us.

MK: And then your father's family in Japan, whatever you've heard, what do you know about your father's family background in Japan?

SK: My father's family in the old days, they were charcoal dealers. In other words, in the old days you burn charcoal for heating and for cooking. So he was selling charcoal. I cannot recall too far, but I guess my grandfather folks had little debts that they owed. My father came to Hawai'i to work and send money back to Japan. He later went back by himself (to Japan), then married my mother and brought my mother back to Hawai'i. That's how I know she went to this Sanyo *jogakkō*. At that time it was one of the well-known *jogakkō*. She graduated from that Sanyo *jogakkō*. When she came (to Hawai'i), she taught at Chūō Gakuin. She said she taught Baron Goto. (Chuckles)

MK: And what *ken* did your father's family come from?

SK: Okayama-*ken* in Japan. You know, in our age group, when you ask who's from Okayama, there are very few people. The only one that we knew were the Tokiokas: Lionel Tokioka and Masayuki Tokioka. We were very close to the Tokiokas because my parents came from the same town, Seto, Okayama. Mr. Masayuki Tokioka's parents, knew them very well because they used to run a nursery in Waikīkī.

WN: This is before International Savings [and Loan Company]?

SK: Way before then. Masayuki's older brother was Bunji. He was a chiropractor. They still have a chiropractic practice on Kalākaua Avenue. You see a lot of Fukuoka, and Hiroshima, Yamaguchi people, but from Okayama, very few people. That's why, the only one we knew was the Tokioka [family].

MK: Did your father ever talk about what his life was like in Okayama-*ken* before he came to Hawai'i?

SK: No, he didn't say much, but I heard when he was young he loved to drink. But when he came to Hawai'i, he turned to Christianity and does not smoke or drink. He was a very religious man after that. That's about all I know. I've been to Japan with my father and we met his younger brother running that charcoal shop in Seto, Okayama. But aside from that, I think he just went to elementary school. He didn't go to junior high school.

MK: And what did he come to Hawai'i for?

SK: Well, I guess he came to Hawai'i because he had debts. In the old days, seems like you could make money and send it back to Japan. That's the reason he came to Hawai'i. He came to Hawai'i as a plantation immigrant, but then I don't think he (stayed too long) in the plantation. He came to Honolulu and he lived near Nu'uanu Congregational Church [which] used to be on Kukui and Nu'uanu. The [church] then moved to School Street and then at present, up on Nu'uanu. He went to night school, learned a little English. My mother (learned) English pretty fast because she graduated [from junior high school in Japan]. My father didn't know much English so he went night school. That's why he

lived on Nu‘uanu [Avenue], right on Nu‘uanu in Downtown. Then later they moved up to Pālolo. That’s all I know, because I was born in Pālolo.

MK: In his early days in Hawai‘i, before he opened up his store, how did he make a living?

SK: Well, all I know is that he worked for Liberty House as a elevator boy. That was his job.

MK: And then you mentioned that your father became a Christian and he went to *yagaku* or night school, Nu‘uanu Congregational.

SK: That’s right.

MK: How did he get involved with the Christians?

SK: Well, I guess when he lived in Nu‘uanu area, he went to a church to learn a little bit of English. I guess that’s how he got started. As long as I remember, he was always a member of that church. There’s a Rev. Horii [who] was one of the early ministers there. I met him in Japan with my father. In Kyoto there’s a Doshisha University. I think he came from there to Hawai‘i, and later on he went back teaching over there. So he was one of the first ones with Mr. [Takie] Okumura. They were just about the same time. We were members of Nu‘uanu [Congregational] Church. And I used to go to church because my parents were going on Sundays. From Pālolo, we had a truck. So with the Ford truck they drove, my brother and I.

MK: I was wondering, what has your mother told you about her background in Japan?

SK: She didn’t say too much, but her relatives ran a *sake* shop at that time in Fukumoto, Japan. I don’t think there’s Fukumoto anymore in Okayama. But she came from Fukumoto. All I know, she went to Sanyo *jogakkō* and they came to Hawai‘i.

MK: And you were saying that your father came over to Hawai‘i first. And then he went back.

SK: Yes, they got married in Japan, and then came back to Hawai‘i together.

MK: After your father worked at Liberty House at the elevator, he eventually started the store. M. Kosasa Grocery and Butcher.

SK: We used to call the store M. Kosasa Shōten (at first).

MK: Where was the store located?

SK: On, that’s what I said, 1425 10th Avenue. That’s where I was born. We opened a store later at 1413 10th Avenue.

WN: So that was later. They moved.

SK: Yes, later, that place, 1425, was owned by Chinese. After many years, they found out we ran a good grocery store, so they wanted to take over. Fortunately, my parents had some property and built some cottages on Hardesty Street. We were able to move to the cottage on Hardesty, open up a grocery store. Like the old days, too, had to get variance and I remember going to Nānākuli. I know George Sumner. But later on, my mother was saying, she went to George Sumner’s parents—I guess (he was) on the board of supervisors at that time or something—to get a signature for approval to (open the store).

I remember way out in Nānākuli. Boy, that was out in the country. We had a truck before. [It was] just about was an all-day ride to Nānākuli. (Chuckles)

MK: That was when you opened up a second store, yeah?

SK: Yeah, temporarily. And then we were very close with the Murashige family. The Murashige family owned the property on 1413 10th Avenue. We were able to buy their property and open the grocery store there. The 1413 10th Avenue [location], that store's been [there] (before the war). The Japanese[-language] school was right next door. In other words, elementary school finished at 2:30 [P.M.], then 2:30 to 3:30 we went to the Japanese school, one-hour Japanese class.

MK: Then going back to that first store that was founded in 1917 . . .

SK: Yeah, 1917, because I was born in 1919.

MK: What have you heard about its beginnings?

SK: All I know is that we had a gas pump, and we used to pump gas. I remember climbing up that pipe. I slipped and fell on the cement and fell unconscious. Fortunately, I just hit my head, I fell. It was raining and I was climbing up that pipe, [it] was slippery.

But aside from that, we worked in the grocery store. That was the first one. And later on we opened up the 1413 10th Avenue. Right on that corner, on Ka'au and 10th Avenue, was this Baba Store. That was a grocery store. So it was kind of a competition between us.

MK: And at that first store your father founded, what kind of goods did he sell besides the gasoline?

SK: It was a grocery and general merchandise. They carry thread and material, and all kinds of [dry goods]—a general store. Not only groceries, but whatever. We sold a lot of kerosene at that time because in the old days we didn't have [electric or gas stoves]—kerosene oil for cooking, so we used to sell a lot kerosene oil.

WN: How did the kerosene oil come?

SK: Well, we used to buy them in big drums. They used to bring that kerosene container and we used to fill it up for them.

WN: Oh, I see. So you had a [fifty]-gallon drum of kerosene. They brought their own containers.

SK: Yeah, they brought their own containers. In the old days, too, no more refrigerators. Of course, we didn't sell ice, but the Murashiges sold ice. I remember—[as a] kid—once in a while I used to help deliver ice with them.

WN: How did you deliver ice?

SK: [The ice] was in big squares and we used to cut them up in about this size. We used to have an ice pick, and we used to pick (the ice and deliver it) to the home. The refrigerator was on its top side, that's where you put the ice. So we used to put the ice over the top of

the refrigerator to keep the refrigerator cool. That's how we used to sell the ice. I didn't sell any, but I used to help deliver ice.

WN: When you say ice pick, you meant sort of like the hook with the handle.

SK: Yeah.

WN: Wow.

SK: Boy, the ice was heavy, too. We used to go all the way to where Fisherman's Wharf is. That's where they had the ice in stor[age]. Mr. Murashige used to bring the truck there. We used to buy ice in a big chunk. Then with a saw, we used to cut it up, [into] smaller pieces.

WN: How many blocks would you get out of one block?

SK: I think they got about eight blocks out of that. We used to cover it up with a bag [to] keep it cold.

MK: Burlap bag?

SK: Burlap bag, yeah.

WN: How long would one block of ice last in a refrigerator?

SK: Gee, must last for at least a couple days, because we never used to go every day. We used to go almost every other day to go deliver it.

MK: So your store, they were selling kerosene, dry goods like thread. What else was sold?

SK: We sold bread. They [bakers] never delivered bread. So my father rode on his bicycle all the way to Love's Bakery or one of the [bakeries] in Downtown, and he used to buy the bread. On the way home from Downtown, he used to drop off some at Mō'ili'ili. [He] sold the bread to the grocery stores over there, and then brought the rest back for us to sell. So that's the way he was able to make some money. I remember he must have been a good bicycle rider because it must have been loaded with bread.

(Laughter)

WN: Where did he load the bread?

SK: On the back. You know, in the old Japan days, he must have delivered charcoal on a bicycle, so he knew how to handle a bicycle and carry heavy stuff.

MK: You also mentioned that the store also sold lots of rice.

SK: Oh, yes.

MK: Where did the rice come from?

SK: Well, it came from California (in 100-pound bags). We used to bag them into ten-pound bags, paper bags.

WN: Oh. So you used to get hundred-pound bags . . .

SK: And we used to make ten packages and get ten-pound bags.

WN: And this is paper package?

SK: Yes, in the brown bag. But that's all they could afford in those days. Even right now, there's only about twenty-pound bags. But generally they were ten-pound bags. I remember feeling pretty proud about that 100-pound bag. I used to be able to lift it up. When they delivered (the rice), we used to unload it and put into the warehouse.

MK: And when you were selling rice, so were you selling other Japanese foods at your store?

SK: Oh yes. In the old days foods were canned. You see the picture? You see the canned goods? Just like that. There were no frozen food at that time. Everything was canned goods. So the can opener, it was very, very popular.

WN: What kind canned goods did they sell a lot?

SK: There were [three] brands I remember. There was a Libby, Del-Monte, and S&W. S&W was a more expensive product than Del-Monte and Libby. Even right now, there's Libby corned beef and Vienna sausages. It's the same thing. They haven't changed. We sold a lot of Vienna sausage and Libby corned beef in a can. And ketchup (in a bottle), because the old days I remember, when I was a kid, they just put the ketchup on hot rice.

(Laughter)

That becomes a meal. That was our age group, they all love ketchup. (Laughs) They put ketchup on everything. You couldn't afford any meat or anything, so what they do is, ketchup and rice.

MK: How about Japanese foods, though? Did your store sell Japanese food?

SK: Japanese food, not too much. Mostly all packaged like the *konnyaku*, and that long rice, we used to carry. All those were dried. We used to sell a lot of *takuan*. They came in big barrels from Japan and got *miso* inside. So we used to take it out and sell it by the pound. That was a good seller.

MK: How about produce?

SK: The only kind of produce we carried was oranges and apples. I remember the old days, oranges and apples, especially the oranges, were wrapped around with the paper. Kind of a—not wax paper, but anyway it was kind of thin. We used to use that as the toilet paper.

MK: Oh, it's soft.

SK: It was kind of soft so we always saved that as toilet paper. That's about all. Only apples and oranges, and little bananas, too. Of course, fresh vegetables, like carrots and like that, that we carry because it grows in Pālolo Valley. They also grow lettuce. And of course, we had onions, too. But the onions came from the Mainland. Round onions.

MK: So, some of the produce you got from farmers in Pālolo, then?

SK: Yes. They used to deliver it.

MK: Who were the farmers in Pālolo Valley in those days?

SK: There's one I know, Walter Takiguchi. He's an insurance man now, and the Naraharas, I don't know whether they're around or not, but they were living way up in the valley and they were growing vegetables, especially lettuce and carrots. Because those are two of the easiest to grow.

WN: Where were the farms in Pālolo? Way in the valley?

SK: Let's see now. There's Pālolo School.

WN: Right, yeah.

SK: Well, just beyond that, where there's housing now, nothing at that time. [There were] only farms up there. There used to be a lot of plums. Small little plum. Plum trees and guava trees. All our foods used to be the guava or the plum. That's all we eat, because apples and oranges were expensive. We hardly ate [apples and oranges].

MK: Your father's store was also a butcher's store.

SK: That came later on, I don't remember much, but on the 1425 [10th Avenue store], they didn't carry [all sorts of meats]—small hamburger kind of stuff. I remember my mother making hamburgers out of the meat and fat. She combined it together and made a hamburger.

WN: The name of the store was M. Kosasa Grocery and Butcher.

SK: Yeah, M. Kosasa. M. Kosasa stands for Morita.

MK: But originally, it was M. Kosasa Shōten?

SK: Yeah, M. Kosasa Shōten.

MK: I'm just curious. In those days, where did your father get all these goods? Like who were the wholesalers that supplied all these things?

SK: There were two wholesalers. One was Theo H. Davies [Company, Ltd.], and there was Amfac [American Factors, Ltd.]. There were only two wholesalers. At that time they were the Big Five, so they carried everything. Lumber, and whatever supplies, but they also carried groceries. So they supplied us with all the groceries. The salesmen used to be Japanese salesmen so they used to come around and take orders, and they used to deliver it to us. (We also bought chicken feed in bulk and we packaged it.)

Then when we had the gas, there was Phillips. But that old time, they used to call it Associated Oil Company. The oil truck used to come in, I remember. Those old-timers, all Japanese guys, were working. They used to deliver the gas and everything. We had a tank and we used to get a stick and we used to measure, make sure that they fill it right up so that we knew how many gallons. Even up to the present time we use the stick to see how much gasoline is in the tank. I was born and raised in a grocery store, so running an ABC Store is almost the same thing.

(Laughter)

SK: That's why we still have the gas[oline]. We don't have it in Honolulu, but in Maui, and Kaua'i we have gas stations, too.

WN: Oh, you do? Oh, I see. And Japanese goods, was that supplied by Amfac and Davies, too?

SK: Yeah. Amfac and Davies, the first time. Seiseido used to sell us the drugs, Japanese drugs like that. Seiseido Shōten. Amfac and Davies still carried the Bayer aspirin, but all the Japanese ones, Seiseido used to sell us. And the Japanese canned goods, I think it was still Davies and Amfac. Later on, I remember my father, they formed a cooperative group and they bought the groceries and canned goods together and then distributed among their own stores. I think Miyata Store used to be a member, and Mō'ili'ili [Market, Ltd.] used to be a member. They formed a buying group and they were able to buy canned goods cheaper.

We sold a lot of soda, too. We had a little share in that. There used to be, in the old days, they called it Honolulu Soda Company [Honolulu Soda Works]. Honolulu Soda used to deliver to us all the sodas, soft drinks. There was no Coca-Cola at that time. It was just orange, and strawberry soda, root beer. [Honolulu Soda Works was] in Kalihi for quite a while, before they closed up.

WN: What were some of the soda brands?

SK: I still remember the Sunkist brand. Then we had root beer, too. Let's see, the root beer, there was A&W root beer. But I remember as a kid we used to make our own root beer with yeast.

WN: Oh, yeah?

SK: Yeah. (Chuckles)

WN: Yeast and what else?

SK: Yeast and, I think they had the root beer concentrate. So we used to put the concentrate and put the yeast. The yeast created that carbonation. We used to bottle it. (Chuckles)

MK: Was that for you to just consume?

SK: Yeah, just for us to consume. Just take little bottles around.

MK: You know, earlier you mentioned your father's store received Japanese drugs from Seiseido, and you said that maybe the aspirin came from Amfac or Theo H. Davies.

SK: Amfac or Davies, yes.

MK: Because drugs were part of your trade, what kind of drugs was your father's store selling?

SK: Mostly was aspirin, sodium bicarbonate tablets, and cough drops. There was some little cough syrup, too. I cannot remember the name of the cough syrup, but I think it was one of the popular ones: Vicks cough syrup, Vicks cough drops, and Luden's cough drops. We used to sell quite a bit of those.

MK: How about the Japanese drugs? What kind of drugs?

SK: The Japanese used to have this aspirin powder in a packet. It was very popular, I can't think of the name, it's in packages from Japan. Instead of buying and taking Bayer aspirin, they used to take this powder aspirin from Japan. So all the old folks take this powdered aspirin and sodium bicarbonate, the powdered one, too, I think. Oh, and we had a kind of a pasty-looking poultice. They heat up that paste and they put it on the chest. It had menthol inside, too, so that used to relieve the cough and cold. We used to sell a lot of that for congestion. In the old days we sold a lot of that. And then, of course, we used to have all the ice caps, too. I remember that poultice, though. They used to heat it up in a bottle and then they used to rub it on their chest. And they used to put flannel over it so that it doesn't get on the pajamas.

MK: How about stomach medicines?

SK: The stomach medicine, I think, was sodium bicarbonate. I cannot recall. I know there was Gintan. Gintan is a breath freshener. I think the Japanese, for upset stomach, they were using some local stuff.

MK: And then, in those days, did the stores sell things like candies or snacks for people?

SK: Oh yes, there was a lot of candies and a lot of *crackseed*. The *crackseed* was very popular. We used to carry them in the jars.

WN: Oh, the big jars?

SK: Yeah. We had to scoop out and sell it. *Crackseed* was very popular, and, of course, the chewing gum. Wrigley's chewing gum. Yes, the chewing gum and little candy. But we didn't have those candy bars, not at that time. So everything was all small balls or something.

WN: Oh, that you would scoop. . . ?

SK: Yeah, scoop in, whatever it is.

MK: Were they locally-made candies?

SK: No, from the Mainland, but they used to come in bulk. Maybe ten pounds, whatever. I remember we used to weigh so much and sell it.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: I know in the old days, sometimes the stores used to sell food items that the store would make. Maybe like *cone sushi* or *chow fun* or something. How about your store?

SK: We used to sell shave ice. We used to get the shave-ice machine. We used to sell a lot of shave ice in a cone cup. It was mostly only strawberry. We used to sell it, I think, five cents a cone. Then we sold a little sushi. Not too much sushi at that time. But the sushi, like I said, my mother made it, not the *maki sushi*, but in a cone.

MK: *Aburage*.

SK: *Aburage*, yeah. We used to cut it in half and then put in the rice. That, we used to sell quite a bit because my mother used to make it.

WN: Did she make it every day?

SK: Yes, and we used to sell it. Those days, that was popular, that *aburage* cone. You don't see too much of them now. There was no such thing as *nigiri sushi*. They were luxury items. I don't think they had such sushi.

WN: What else did your mother make besides *cone sushi*?

SK: She made another thing, they call it. . . . I can't think of it now, but it's kind of expensive stuff. But it's kind of slippery stuff.

MK: *Tokoroten*?

SK: *Tokoroten*, yes.

(Laughter)

She used to make that, too. I remember we had the machine and we used to pass it through and then *tokoroten* comes out. Those are stuff we used to make—*tokoroten*, and the sushi. That was very popular.

WN: Any kind of *bentō*, plate lunch, or anything like that?

SK: No. We didn't have those things. Just like individual, like that *tokoroten*.

MK: I know that in the old days, too, sometimes during the holidays, stores would make special things or sell special things like on *Oshōgatsu*, or Boys' Day, Girls' Day. How about your father's store?

SK: Well, all I remember is on New Year's Eve, we used to sell a lot of soda. In the old days, they used to have them in [wooden] crates, so we used to deliver in the crates. We used to deliver, maybe, fifty-pound bags of rice. I remember that's the only special occasion you could sell so much rice and so much soda. But aside from that, I cannot recall too much. All I know is that we used to go to the principal every New Year's and extend our greetings to the principal. (Chuckles)

WN: Japanese[-language] school?

SK: Japanese[-language] school. That was a habit. Boy, every New Year's, we all got to go to say our greetings to him. (Chuckles) "*Omedetō gozaimasu*," or something.

(Laughter)

WN: Did you enjoy doing that?

SK: It was a kind of ritual, so we all used to do that. I know we'd get scolding from my parents if you don't do it. (Chuckles)

- MK: Your father's store sold all sorts of items.
- SK: Yes, and we were the only grocery store around there, so we were like the hub for the baseball team. They used to have that Pālolo group. They were a little older than me. They were playing baseball. They play [against] Mō'ili'ili, or Pālama. When they come back, my parents used to give them free sodas.
- MK: Oh, wow.
- SK: They were happy, though, at that time.
- MK: In those days, what kind of services did your father's store give? You mentioned delivery. They would . . .
- SK: Oh, yes, we usually deliver it. In fact, when I was a little kid I used to go to the houses and we used to call it *chūmontori*. We used to take orders, whatever they want, and then we used to come back. [We packed] whatever canned goods, whatever they want, and we used to deliver it in the afternoon.
- MK: So in those days did you have a regular schedule?
- SK: It's a regular schedule so that all the homes would know that we'd be coming around to take orders.
- MK: So how large was the area that you folks delivered to?
- SK: Mostly all in Pālolo Valley. We didn't go beyond Wai'alae Avenue because at that time, from Wai'alae Avenue on the other side, they had that Chinese market on Koko Head Avenue. Later on Piggly-Wiggly came up, too. But all our customers were all from Wai'alae Avenue on the Pālolo side, 10th Avenue.
- WN: You mentioned a Murashige Store?
- SK: They had a cleaning shop.
- WN: Oh, that wasn't a store. Your father's store was pretty much the only store.
- MK: How about Baba Store though?
- SK: Baba Store was there later on, too. So they were, more or less, our competition. But my mother was a pretty sharp business lady. She used to know all the kids' names that come around. So all of them used to come to our store because my mother used to be pretty good. There's a lot of Puerto Ricans at that time. She knows a little bit Puerto Rican [i.e., Spanish]—pick up the Puerto Rican language and speak to them in Puerto Rican so they're more happy to shop in our store. She was a sharp businesswoman.
- MK: In those early days, your father's store, who were the customers? What types of people came to your father's store?
- SK: As I said, most of them were Japanese, and then Chinese, and mostly all in the valley. There's a lot of Puerto Ricans and Portuguese living up in the valley and they all used to shop in our store. In the old days, there was horse and buggies. I remember in the burlap bag like that, we used to [pick] all the *kiawe* beans, we used to fill them all up and we

used to sell them for ten cents a bag. I think ten cents a bag or five cents a bag. We used to sell it to those who had horses. The old days, all the horse and buggies used to come here from the valley. Even the groceries like that, I mean, food, they used to bring it in. Fruits like that.

WN: So some people, they would come into the store to buy, and other people you would go out and take orders?

SK: Yes.

WN: In the early days, was it mostly people coming in or mostly people that you took orders from?

SK: Mostly taking orders. We used to do a lot of delivery in the morning and in the afternoon.

WN: Was it just you or was this . . . ?

SK: No, no. We hired. In fact, there's Harry's Music Store. Harry [Y. Yoshioka], he used to work for us, worked for my parents before. Later on he went to McInerny, and later on he opened up the Harry's Music. Because all that time, he loved (to play) the trumpet. I remember as a child, he had a group, and he used to go to the Chinese funerals, and he played music there, and he gets paid. He was working for us for a long time. He used to deliver. His younger brother, Takeo, worked for us, too. That's why we know the Yoshiokas very well. There was another [person] Mr. Fuji used to deliver, too, for us.

MK: What other workers worked in your father's store?

SK: In fact, Fuji and the other person, I remember they used to live in our house. We gave them a room. My mother cooked for them. We paid them wages, but not too much because they lived with us. Later on we hired a Chinese butcher. Aside from that, just my father, my mother, and about four people.

WN: What about your brother [Neil Kosasa]? Did he work?

SK: My older brother, he worked. He was older, so he did more of the work than I did.

(Laughter)

MK: When you look back, what was your father's job at the store?

SK: As I say, he loves carpentry work. So that's why we have quite a few cottages. Of course, he didn't build it, but he kind of watched and supervised. Like I remember the old days, we used to paint the roof so it won't leak. We used to paint a lot. In the old days, before the sewer (was installed), we had to put the sewer line in. My father [brought] all the pipes like that. He did all the work. I helped him dig the ditch and put in the pipe. And, of course, we had a plumber who connected it, but he did all the work on that. We had the cottages, anytime leak, he always used to go and fix all the leaks. He did good plumbing work and painting. He loved to do that. So although he worked in a grocery store, he didn't do much waiting [on customers]. My mother did all the waiting and everything. But he's in the background, cleaning up the warehouse.

MK: So your mother waited on the customers. She mixed the meat for the hamburger?

- SK: Yes, she was pretty good all around, but mostly she was a good PR [public relations] lady, so she always greets the customers. (MK chuckles.)
- WN: Your mother's English was better than your father's?
- SK: Yes, much better. And she picked up Puerto Rican. She was well rounded. She goes to church on her own, she always get a ride. She was pretty good. (Laughs) She always get a ride. When someone came to fix the house, she always give them soda water, or something. Just a little bit of a thing. They appreciate it so much that they go extra to do things for her.
- WN: What about keeping the books? Who did that?
- SK: We had a bookkeeper part-time, but my father kept the books, though.
- MK: I was wondering, in those days, did the store advertise?
- SK: No, there was no advertising. But it's kind of word-of-mouth, I guess since the Japanese school was right in the back. We didn't do any advertising because we were—old days—way out in the country. We were not in town. Downtown, they used to have [stores like] Musashiya and Sato Clothiers. They were all Downtown people. And Kawahara [Company] had the aquarium. I knew all of them very well after they grew up. We all grew up together. (Chuckles) But when we were kids, they were Downtown. We were the country jacks.
- (Laughter)
- WN: Do you want to take a break and drink some water? Do you want to take a short break?
- SK: No, I'm all right.
- WN: You sure?
- SK: Yes.
- WN: Okay.
- MK: In Pālolo, was there like a Japanese community?
- SK: Yes.
- MK: What were your mother's and father's role in that community?
- SK: Well, there was the Japanese school. My parents always donated things to the Japanese school. Eventually there was a YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association], the Pālolo YMCA. They donated a property to the YMCA. That's how the YMCA got started in Pālolo which is now the [Kaimukī-Wai'alaē] YMCA.
- WN: Oh, Kaimukī Y.
- SK: Used to be [known as] Kaimukī Y. Mr. Watada was one of the first YMCA counselors. Then later on came Taichi Matsuno. But first was Mr. Watada and Matsuno came after. They really started the thing. Later on they moved over to Wai'alaē-Kāhala.

- MK: Your parents were very community-minded.
- SK: Yes, they were community-minded. As I said, they made a lot of donations to the YMCA and to the Nu‘uanu Congregational Church. So we kind of followed, so that’s why we founded the Kosasa Foundation. We have a foundation for that (purpose). We support the community, too. But we picked that all up from my parents.
- WN: Were your parents, by doing all this, were they unusual or was that fairly common for small storekeepers to give . . . ?
- SK: Well, I think, because we were in the retail business, they got involved in community affairs. My mother was, as I say, issei, but she was one of those that were educated, so she was able to meet all kinds of people and not hesitate. My father didn’t have much of an education so he always stays in the background. My father, he’s very religious fellow, but very quiet. He always stays in the background.
- MK: When you look back, who do you think was the real business decision-making person? Your mother or your father?
- SK: My mother. Of course, on the final decision, my father makes it, but she’s the aggressive one. She was well liked by all the people, so they all respect her. She, more or less, made all the decisions. She’s the one who told me to get in pharmacy. There were Stewart’s Pharmacy, and Benson Smith [& Co.] drugstore in the old days. (My mother would) say, “Oh, the drugstores make more money than grocery stores, so you might as well get in (pharmacology).”
- WN: I wonder, did they sell ice cream?
- SK: Oh yes. We used to scoop lot of the ice cream. Ice cream and shave ice. Later on we had the Popsicle, and Milky Way. All that came afterwards, after the bulk ice cream. I remember that, too, because I remember Milky Way had the stick [with “free” written] inside and sometimes you get it free.
- WN: Oh yes. That’s Milk Nickel right?
- SK: Milk Nickel, yes. If you’re lucky, you look (on the stick), you get a free Milk Nickel.
- WN: I wonder, did you ever have problems with shoplifting? Kids coming around?
- SK: Gee, not that we know of. Most of the kids, they were pretty honest. They’d get embarrassed if they ever got caught or anything. In our area, all, more or less, community-minded so they all tried to help each other.
- WN: And I’m wondering, how many people were working in the store at one time?
- SK: I would say about five at the most. That includes my father and my mother, and about three outsiders.
- MK: And then what were the hours of the store?
- SK: From about seven in the morning to about ten at night.
- WN: Ten at night?

- SK: Yes. Seven days a week. My mother used to feed us and then (the workers). That's why we all lived close by the grocery store. So they all ate dinner and they came right down (to the store).
- MK: In those days, how were payments made? How did people pay?
- SK: Oh, there were a lot of charges. A lot of charges. And once a month we used to send them the bill. My mother was pretty good. Whoever cannot afford to pay, she let it go or let them ride until they could afford to. That part, people were very thankful when they couldn't make a payment. She never used to force it.
- WN: Could anybody charge?
- SK: Oh yes, we used to have lot of charge accounts. That *chūmontori*, as I say, used to put them on charges. They don't pay [immediately]. We deliver, and once a month they pay.
- WN: Did you ever have problems with people not paying?
- SK: Well, there must have had, but she was pretty good though. [SK's mother would] say, "Okay, you don't have to pay." Especially the Portuguese like that, sometimes they got hard times. "Oh, that's all right. When you get paid, you pay."
- Later on, we had liquor, too. We sold a lot of them. Not hard liquor, but a lot of beer.
- MK: In those days, what brands of beer?
- SK: Well, there used to be—one of the popular ones was Acme Beer, and Pabst Blue Ribbon. We used to sell a lot of them. And Lucky Lager. Those were the three. Of course, those go back quite a few years.
- MK: I was wondering, how big were the stores? The first store and the second store? You know, square feet?
- SK: I would say about 1,500 square foot was the biggest store. We only had about 1,000 square feet. Small store, but there was no self-service at that time. All showcase like this so we used to always get it [i.e., the merchandise] for them.
- WN: So it was either in the showcase or against the wall?
- SK: Or against the wall, yes.
- MK: Did you folks have a warehouse?
- SK: Yes, we had a warehouse in the back of the store. Of course, the selling area is just about 1,000 square feet. So maybe another 500 square feet in the warehouse. Not like what it is right now. It was small. Just like out in the country, mamas and papas, that kind.
- MK: And then you mentioned that your family had cottages.
- SK: Yeah, right around, on 10th Avenue. We still own them. Over fifty years. We did a lot of renovation, but, gee, the cottages are old.
- MK: When your father had the cottages, was he renting them out?

- SK: Yeah. We were renting. The rent was, even today, kind of reasonable. They [renters] don't move. They stay a long time. Twenty, thirty years, they still staying there.
- WN: So try and describe the store. There's a photo there, but the store was in the front, right on the street, warehouse was in the back.
- SK: Warehouse in the back. Even on this store, in the back is the warehouse.
- WN: So there would be a driveway where the trucks could go in the back?
- SK: No. It used to be all on the front street. Even on this, on the front. On this one we have a little space that the truck can go in on this side, but not on this one here. They always had to deliver in the front.
- WN: I see. And your living quarters were in the back? Upstairs?
- SK: Back, upstairs, yes. On 1415 we lived right across the street.
- WN: A house? Oh, okay.
- SK: We had the cottages. One of the cottages, we lived in there.
- WN: And this 1425 [10th Avenue] now, how many rooms were there?
- SK: I think we only had one big room upstairs, I think that's it. I think the kitchen was downstairs in the back. We used to walk upstairs and the bedroom was upstairs. That's the only bedroom upstairs and kitchen downstairs. We used to eat downstairs, too.
- WN: In the kitchen?
- SK: Yeah, in the kitchen. Right next.
- MK: In those days, did you have your own *furoba*?
- SK: *Furoba*, no. We used to have something like a community one. Right—there are some houses there. We used to all share the bath together.
- MK: So, was it one you pay?
- SK: No, no, no. I don't know who paid for the water, but we all have to help heat the [water]—the old days, we [used] fire, no heater, so we had to put the wood under. And then, it was a wooden bathtub, so you could wash outside and take a bath inside. We never wash inside [the tub]. So that's how we used to kind of share.
- WN: How far away was it?
- SK: It was close by. The other houses were right around. So there was one right in the center. In the old days, too, there was a cooking area, too. The old days, Japanese style, you had to put fire and cook. There was no gas or anything.
- WN: So your kitchen was a community kitchen?

- SK: No. Our kitchen, we had our own one. But the neighbors, there were four or five neighbors all used it.
- WN: Like a camp.
- SK: Like a camp, yes?
- WN: What about toilet?
- SK: Toilets, we had our own.
- WN: Was it upstairs or downstairs?
- SK: No, I think downstairs. You pull that lever. Water comes out (in the toilet).
- WN: But you don't remember just the outdoor outhouse with the hole?
- SK: No, that I remember in Japan, but not in Hawai'i. At that time in the old days, we had cesspool (in Hawai'i). We all had a cesspool. So that, we all used. And then [every] so many months then the truck comes and . . .
- MK: Takes it [waste] out.
- SK: Takes it out, yeah.
- WN: Did you folks eat in shifts?
- SK: My brother and I, we always ate together. The workers, they eat later. They eat after we ate, or sometimes they eat together. But it's not big enough for all to eat together.
- MK: And your mother cooked all of the food for everybody?
- SK: Yes. That's why, in a way, it was good we had the grocery store. Cooked something before it gets spoiled. (Chuckles)
- WN: Yeah. I'm wondering, we talked earlier about payment. You know, people would pay at the end of the month. Did they pay—was it only cash that you remember?
- SK: I think was mostly cash. At that time, very few checks, though. Mostly cash.
- WN: But it wasn't like paying with something else? Like trading for anything?
- SK: No.
- WN: It was all money.
- SK: All, yes. We used to charge them so my mother used to have the invoice and everything, how much it is. And if they don't pay, then maybe next month. Then we put "paid" on it.
- MK: Do you know the invoice and things, was it written in Japanese or English?

- SK: Mostly was in English, I think, because we just had the charge number on it, we put the charge number on it and the amount on it. And they get the receipt, so then they can check what items.
- WN: Was there a bench in the front?
- SK: There was a bench in the front of the store, yeah, so they could sit down on it. But this other store, we didn't have any. The 1413 we had, but 1425 we didn't have any bench.
- MK: Was the bench well used?
- SK: Oh yeah. It was a kind of [a] get-together [place]. They all get together and sit there and talk stories.
- WN: Was your father considered—for a storekeeper, did they ask your father to do certain favors or anything like that?
- SK: No, I don't think they asked for any. They used to have that *kenjinkai*. At the *kenjinkai*, they get together, but there was no kind of individual thing. They had that *tanomoshi*, or whatever they call it. So that's how they, more or less, get together. Of course, like in the funeral, *kōden* [was offered]. They used to have the *kenjinkai*. That's where they usually kind of get together.
- MK: Was it like a Pālolo *chōjinkai* or *kumiai*?
- SK: I think they call it Kaimukī Kenjinkai. Most of the Japanese was inside the valley, see, Kaimukī Kenjinkai. Just like they get Pālama and Mō'ili'ili Kenjinkai. So that's why we were called Kaimukī.
- MK: You mentioned *tanomoshi*. How often did your father use the *tanomoshi*?
- SK: I can't recall how much money they used to put in, though. They used to put in either monthly or when they needed it. They said, we're going to need so much for certain thing, then they all used to put in together. But as long as I know, they never had any problem about anybody not paying. So that *kenjinkai* in Kaimukī, that was a close group. Of course, the Japanese school was there, too. So, more or less, they did pretty good. I mean, the old days, as I say, Kaimukī was just Kaimukī Kenjinkai. If you went Mō'ili'ili, well, you got nothing to do with Mō'ili'ili or Pālama guys. When we were kids, we used to challenge them in baseball or something. But otherwise, we don't have too much connection with them. Mostly through the Japanese school, see.
- MK: What are the names of some of the people in that Kaimukī group? You have the Kosasas, Murashiges . . .
- SK: We have the Nakaharas, Kuwadas, Hatas. Those are close friends of my parents, too. Kitsuwa. Those were, more or less, the close ones.
- MK: I know that in the old days, Japanese storekeepers, sometimes they would write letters for people who couldn't write as well.
- SK: Yes, my mother used to do that every so often. She used to write like letters for somebody that in Japan, they don't know how to write too much. My mother used to do that.

- MK: And I know sometimes the storekeepers, too, because they were prominent in the community, they used to be sort of like the go-between for the community and the Japanese consulate. How about your dad?
- SK: No. Way back in the '20s and '30s, we're out in the country. Even with the Japanese consulate, we very seldom make contact with them.
- MK: And since your father was running a business in the '20s and '30s, how did the depression affect him?
- SK: Fortunately, I know it was depression, but they always ran a good solid business. So even in depression, they were able to pay the bills on time and they never took too many chances. So although they had depression, they were able to meet whatever circumstances came. I don't recall anyway. They always say it's getting tight, so conserve. I mean, don't spend money foolishly on anything. That's about all I can recall. I'm sure they had a lot of families that couldn't make payments. I know my mother said they forgave a lot of payments, too.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 37-2-1-01; SIDE ONE

- WN: We were talking about the store and everything, but we never asked you, what did you do to have good fun as a kid growing up in Pālolo?
- SK: Well, I was kind of a rascal guy, but I used to love to play in our neighborhood area. So we used to get together. Then we also had the YMCA. The YMCA, being pretty good because they had the YMCA sports. The basketball. Then as a kid, we used to play baseball and football. We used to use the St. Louis College. You know St. Louis High School? They're on 6th Avenue, but they're the closest to us because they were the only one who has a playing field. So we used to go over there and we used to play football. Kaimukī Park didn't have enough area to play football. And they used to have track meets over there, so we used to take advantage of that. On the weekend, when the school was closed, we used to walk to St. Louis. We used to go through the back side. From 6th Avenue there's a trail go right up. We used to use that trail and get into the back of St. Louis, then we used to play football and track. Then the Kaimukī Japanese School had a basketball court on the grounds, so we used to play basketball over there, too.
- WN: When you say "we," who were your friends?
- SK: My friends, okay, George Kuwada, Chauncy Kitsuwā, Ko Hata, Eddie Nakamura.
- WN: I'm wondering, those friends of yours, what kinds of jobs did their parents have?
- SK: Well, mostly they must have been looking for some other type of [work], either contracting or—but none of them, I recall, worked for the state [i.e., territory] or the city and county. Most of them were working for some other company. Either worked for [Theo H.] Davies or Amfac. I know Kuwada was running a taxi. He had a taxi. And like the Hatas, he was working for the ice company. I guess, as a child, I really didn't think much about what the parents were doing. But we all grew up together, went to elementary school together, junior high, high school.

MK: In addition to your sports activities like basketball, baseball, football, and track, what else did you do for fun?

SK: We used to go swimming and surfing at Waikīkī. We used to walk all the way from Pālolo to Waikīkī Natatorium. We used to go swimming. On our way home, we used to get hungry. There used to be a lot of date trees. We used to throw rocks up there and knock the dates down and we used to eat lot of dates. But as a group—group of five or six—we all used to walk together all the way down to Waikīkī, swim, and then walk back home. That was quite an experience, though. We couldn't afford any streetcar or anything, so we all had to walk.

WN: Well, I can imagine going to school and working at your father's store. Did your father have hours for you or was there just a certain time that you have to stay and help and work? Did you have a lot of time to play with your friends? Were there times you had to stay around the store and work?

SK: Yes. Especially, like high school, I wanted to go play basketball. But my parents said, "You of age already. You better work in the store after school, not go practice or anything." That's why I dropped playing basketball because they figured I should be working instead. In between I helped, but, as I say, my older brother worked more than I did. (Chuckles)

MK: We didn't ask you, did you get paid?

SK: No, no, we didn't even get paid at all. We just worked. They said, "You got to help the store," that's all.

WN: You said you were a rascal. Did you get into any kind of mischief?

SK: We used to, Japanese school, two to three [o'clock]. Sometimes we're playing basketball and they say we got to go to Japanese school or we'll get yelled at. I say, "No, let's play some more."

(Laughter)

I influenced some of the guys, "No, no, we go play some more."

(Laughter)

But aside from that, we were pretty close-knit. I wanted to go caddy. Pālolo used to have a golf course, too. A long time ago. That's where most of the guys made money. You would get paid twenty-five cents for nine holes. I wanted to go caddy because then I will get paid. But my parents tell me, "You got to work in the store." But I used to take off and go with the boys, go caddy, too. But that's why, most of the boys in Pālolo, they're pretty good golfers. Like Kuwada, he coaches for 'Iolani, assistant coach, golf team. But they all used to go caddy, make money on the weekend. I guess when we're kids, we all were always close together. Right now the kids, of course, get cars and everything, they go everywhere they can.

WN: I was wondering, could you get anything in the store you wanted at any time? In other words, if you wanted an ice cream, could you just go and pick and eat?

SK: Well, no. My parents are kind of strict. They won't let you go in there, pick.

(Laughter)

But I used to nibble. *Crackseed*, you know, in the bulk, I used to take a bite or two only. Otherwise, we never because we know that it costs us money to buy that stuff, too. So we never did take any real advantage of it.

WN: So none of your friends says, "Hey, can you give us some soda?"

(Laughter)

SK: No. I guess at that time it was a tough time, too. Nobody really asked for anything. We used to walk wherever we could. We never used to go to [movie] show or anything like that. That's why I guess we all in Pālolo Valley. The Kaimukī guys, they were more exposed to the theater and all this stuff. We were inside [the valley] so we never. . . .

MK: In those days, since you were in the valley, was Kaimukī town just like town [i.e., urbanized] to you?

SK: Yes, a little. That looked more the town side. You know, because that's where shops are, a little bigger ones. So we never did get along with the guys living up there on the other side. Mostly Chinese. We never did meet with them too much.

WN: Were they like the city slickers?

SK: Yeah. (Chuckles) I guess, on the other side, more well-to-do people. So, you know just like the Wos. Bob Wo. They were all living up in that area. So there was, more or less, the parents . . .

WN: Like what area? This is on the other [i.e., *makai*] side of Wai'alae Avenue?

SK: Yeah.

WN: Like on what streets?

SK: From Koko Head Avenue going towards Kāhala side till about 14th, 15th Avenue on Wai'alae, right inside that area there. You see, 14th, 15th, and then Koko Head Avenue. All the Chinese used to live over there. They were, more or less, way ahead of our parents, too, so they (lived in) a better area. Inside [Pālolo Valley], no more sidewalk or anything like that. They were way ahead of us.

WN: Wasn't the streetcar running right down Wai'alae?

SK: Yeah, that's the station. That's the main street. It goes up to Wai'alae and up to Koko Head Avenue, and then turns around and goes down. We're about three blocks inside Wai'alae, so the only time we go out that way is catch the streetcar. Otherwise, we always play inside the valley side.

WN: Where would you catch the streetcar to go? Where would you go on the streetcar?

SK: Go up to 10th and Wai'alae. They used to stop on every corner. They stop if you're standing there. But if you don't stand, they pass. But they used to stop on every corner.

WN: Did you ride the streetcar?

SK: Yeah, we used to ride the streetcar when we went to high school.

WN: Oh, I see.

SK: But junior high school was Lili'uokalani School. We used to only walk to over there.

WN: Maybe we could get into that next time. Should we stop here?

MK: Yeah, I think we should stop here.

WN: Can we stop here, and we'll continue another time?

SK: Yes.

MK: Next time, we're going to continue with your school days.

SK: School days.

MK: From Pālolo School, all the way.

WN: Okay, let me stop then.

SK: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape Nos. 37-3-2-01 and 37-4-2-01

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sidney Kosasa (SK)

Honolulu, Hawai'i

September 6, 2001

BY: Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

SK: We had the trail [in Pālolo Valley] to come back down to where we lived, so that's where we were able to pick up a lot of guava and plums. We knew just by the color of the leaves, which is sweet guava, and which is not the sweet guava. But those plums, if you drop on your shirt, you know it stains. It's purple, so my parents get hard time washing the stains off.

WN: What kind of plum is that?

SK: It's small. We call it plum because it grows on the tree. I don't see too much around, but it's small like a date plum. But, they grow in the valley someplace. I'm sure they have it out in the country. It's a tall tree. It's not the one like in the orchards, they hang, and they grow low. No, these are regular fruits.

MK: And you mentioned Pālolo Stream. Did you folks play in the Pālolo Stream?

SK: Well, we used to in the Hawaiian way catch 'ōpae, shrimps. We used to get horsehair from the horse, because the hair was strong. We used to tie it on a coconut tree [branch midrib], and with the string we tie 'em up and we make a loop and we used to tie [a] dried shrimp on the string, see, to catch the ['ōpae]. As soon as the ['ōpae] shrimp comes out, we go from the back way [i.e., from behind]. We used to catch quite a few. We used to mix it with the shoyu and sugar and that used to be a real good treat for us.

WN: How many would you catch at one time?

SK: Oh, we would catch about two dozen. And some big ones, you know.

WN: So you'd catch them one at a time?

SK: One at a time.

WN: Oh. This is 'ōpae or is this crayfish?

SK: 'Ōpae. Small.

WN: How big was the 'ōpae?

- SK: Small. Yeah, couple inches. Small, but they got pretty good tails. We used to cook the thing and eat the whole thing. The skin and all.
- MK: And then you mentioned that you used the horsetail. Where would you get the horsetail from?
- SK: As I mentioned earlier, those days get a lot of horse and buggy. The horses used to come down and we just pick up the horses' hair. It's thin, it's just like a thread. Yet, it's strong. So we used to make a loop out of it.
- WN: So you make a loop out of the hair?
- SK: Yes. It's a loop, you know how you make it so that when you squeeze it, it tightens up.
- WN: Oh, okay.
- SK: When we catch the tail [of the '*ōpae*'], and then we pull it, squeeze it, the loop becomes small.
- WN: And the other end was tied to the coconut [midrib]?
- SK: Just get the coconut [midrib] and just get the horsehair. We make a loop, and then we used to tie thread around it. We used to get a dry shrimp and tie it, so that the shrimp stuck. So then with the left hand, we get the shrimp, we make sure we can get it out. Then with the right hand, we get that loop around it. This is the tail, and we get the thing, and we just scoop it [*'ōpae*] up and we pull them. We used to catch a lot of them.
- MK: How about fish in the stream?
- SK: We used to catch *dojo*, used to catch a lot, but Japanese, don't eat the *dojo*. That and they had catfish. They said catfish sting, so we always more worried about the catfish. But there was another one, not goldfish, not mullet, but they had another fish.
- WN: '*O'opu*.
- SK: '*O'opu*, yes, '*o'opu*. But we never ate those '*o'opu*. We get lot of *dojo*, we could scoop 'em up, slippery. But we never did eat it; the shrimp [*'ōpae*] was what we were going for. So you had to know under what rock you most likely find the [*'ōpae*] shrimps.
- MK: And who used to go with you?
- SK: All my classmates. The old days like camping so we all were same age group. We used to go out there.
- WN: Did you swim in the stream, too?
- SK: Yeah.
- WN: How deep was it?
- SK: Not too deep, but deep enough. You had to go to kind of a deep place where you could swim. So then certain area, pool, was kind of deep, so therefore we used to swim. We

never did swim too much in the river, because we used to go down to Waikīkī and swim there.

MK: Then, when did you start at Pālolo School?

SK: Well, we had a kindergarten before where they have that Japanese[-language] school. They had a kindergarten at that time. So, we went to the kindergarten and then I went to Lili'uokalani School. I went to the first grade there and then second. And then third grade, I guess they had to divide the district, we had to go to Pālolo School.

MK: So, you know that kindergarten, where was it located?

SK: Right now they have the Kaimukī Evangelical Church, I think. It used to be YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] over there, and the Japanese[-language] school, and then later on the Kaimukī Congregational Church is there now. And then the store, the Hobbietat, the grocery store used to be. So, the school was right behind there. That used to be the Japanese school.

MK: And I know you were really young, but what memories do you have of that kindergarten?

SK: Well, kindergarten, I know a teacher named Mrs. Crosby. She lived on about 8th Avenue, nice *Haole* lady, kindergarten, and she was real nice to me. But, that's about all I remember. Then the Japanese School there was a Mrs. Akagi, taught us first grade Japanese school. But, they were the ones I could remember the name to.

MK: And you were saying Mrs. Crosby was nice to you, how was she nice to you?

SK: Well, you know, we had the grocery store too, and she used to patronize our store. My parents knew Mrs. Crosby well, so she was always nice to us. I mean, she was nice to everybody.

MK: And then your first grade and second grade you went to Lili'uokalani.

SK: Yeah.

MK: At that time, where was Lili'uokalani?

SK: In the same place it is right now, on Koko Head and Wai'alae [Avenues]. In fact, it was in the paper the other day, they celebrated Queen Lili'uokalani or [a school anniversary]. But, it was first an elementary school, then later on it became an intermediate school, and now they reverted back to elementary school. Because they started Kaimukī Intermediate School on Kīlauea Avenue.

MK: How were the teachers at Lili'uokalani?

SK: You know it's a funny thing, I cannot recall too much on the teachers, first and second grade [at Lili'uokalani School]. I know I went to Pālolo, I know the principal was Mr. Kipapa, and all I know Mr. Kipapa was a sixth-grade teacher, but he was the principal, too.

He said, "Boy, if you don't behave yourself," he's gonna [use] ruler, or something. He's going to slap your hand. (Chuckles) I remember that, I never did get it, but he scared everybody. "See, boy, if you don't behave, you keep up, I'm gonna . . ."

WN: Hit your hand?

SK: Yeah, hit with your hand like this. I think with a ruler or something, anyway, the stick. (Chuckles). So he used to scare all of us. Got to behave otherwise you go to Kipapa. He was Hawaiian. He wasn't nice; he was strict I remember.

WN: What was more strict, English school or Japanese school?

SK: I think Japanese school was more strict. It was only one hour, but they were strict though.

WN: Like in what way?

SK: Well, they make sure you do your homework and do your studies, you know. They never hit anybody, but I remember one teacher knew *judo*. He said, "Boy you gotta be careful with that guy, because otherwise they're going to give you the *judo*" (chuckles). But, aside from that—Mr. Ishizaki was one of my good Japanese[-language] school teachers. He was real good. But, before say about the last ten minutes [of class] he always used to give the history of Japan. That's how I remember, he mentioned the Tokugawa era, and he told me [about] the Hideyoshi period. At that time I didn't think too much about it, but now when I see the TV shows like that, I remember all the things. He was a real good teacher, he always used to give us the history of Japan.

MK: I know in those days a lot of *nisei*, they tell us that at the Japanese schools, you folks used to have something called *shūshin*, or morals education.

SK: Well, they used to have awards. I only got about one time (laughs). Every year, the end of the year, you know, they give awards to the top student. So, but as they say, they were strict. That's why I'm not too good in Japanese, but at least I learned my Japanese.

MK: And in those days, what did you learn in Japanese? Reading? Writing?

SK: Reading, writing. I quit after the eighth grade, so I didn't pursue beyond the eighth grade in Japanese. The Japanese school was still up to eighth grade in Pālolo, but after that you had to go to Downtown, and I didn't want to go Downtown.

MK: You know, since your mother was once a Japanese-language teacher, what was her involvement in your Japanese language education?

SK: Well, she didn't push us in education, more or less, just left us alone, you know. [SK's parents] never helped because they don't know much about English. The Japanese, she help us a little bit, but nothing too much that I could recall. She helped me one time write a speech or something in Japanese, but that's about all I can recall. But as they said, Japanese[-language] schoolteachers were good, and it was right next to our store too, so the teachers and my parents were good friends, too. But they never favored me for any grades, you know.

(Laughter)

So my parents helped the Japanese school too, you know. Finances or something like that, they always used to help.

MK: And then going back to your English school, Pālolo School in the early days, where was it located and what did it look like?

SK: I think the school is still there, but in the fifth and sixth grade if you do your homework and everything else—we used to have school until about two o'clock. So right after lunch, one to two, they let you work out in the garden. That's where I learned how to plant lettuce and carrots. Pālolo is out in the open, so they let us raise lettuce and carrots. So that was a free time. I remember though, we used to be able to right after lunch, do your homework and everything, you don't have to take anymore class.

MK: That was like a treat then for you.

SK: Yes, it was like a treat.

MK: To get out of class.

SK: Yes, get out of class, but that was sort of like an incentive for you to do your work and everything so that you could, you know.

MK: You mentioned Mr. Kipapa who was sixth-grade teacher and principal at Pālolo, who were some of the other teachers that you had at Pālolo?

SK: There was another Hawaiian, Miss Kawaiahao, she was a fourth- or fifth-grade teacher. She was a good teacher and taught us math and English. And there was a Mrs. Wong too, sixth grade, the son is much older than me, but he's an M.D. [in] practice on the Mainland. [The Wongs' son,] Andrew Wong, was in the Boy Scouts too, although he never did go to Pālolo School. Through Boy Scouts I knew him. So I knew that his mother was our schoolteacher in Pālolo. Aside from that, not too much activity because as I said, we go to Japanese school.

MK: And then you know when you were in elementary school, what kind of student were you?

SK: Well, I wouldn't say I was an A student, I was kind of a B student. You know, always get the B's. I never was the top student, see. So, most of our friends were just about in the B classes, so we used to get together. There were a few, but not too many A students, I remember though. But I know at Lili'uokalani there was an Inouye, and he was an A student. His father was a contractor, I can't think of his name now.

MK: What did you think about school when you were in the elementary grades? Did you like it?

SK: I won't say I didn't like it, but it was, you know, you had to go to school. I wasn't one of those studious guys; I'd rather play sports. So, I used to play a lot of sports, I did my homework too, but I wasn't a top student (chuckles).

MK: So those days at elementary school, what courses did you like?

SK: Well, you learn English and math you know, and I liked math more. But I'm not too much into English because in the old days we had all the pidgin English. You know, the funny thing, our age group they say you don't want to speak like a *Haole*, so we never did. When you try to speak the correct English, they kind of tease you, "You speak like a *Haole*." So we never did really put emphasis on that, and of course once we went to high school it's a little different. But up until elementary school you know, that old pidgin English was our standard. So that's the reason why most of us [did] arithmetic and science, but never concentrate on English, as we'd like to.

- MK: And then those days, what kind of kids went to Pālolo School?
- SK: Mostly Japanese. Not too many Chinese, but we had the Portuguese and all. Pālolo School was in the valley so you know, most of us were working people. In Pālolo too, not too many Chinese, mostly Chinese were up on the Kaimukī other side. So, mostly our group all went to Japanese school together, too. Because most of [the] English school [students] go to Japanese school, we all stuck together.
- MK: And then in those days, how big was the class at Pālolo School?
- SK: Oh, must have had about thirty. Mostly I would say were Japanese and there were a few Portuguese and Hawaiian in our class.
- WN: Where did the Chinese go to school, do you know?
- SK: Most of them went to Lili'uokalani. That's why when they kind of split up the district, all those on Wai'alae on this [*makai*] side went to Lili'uokalani. That's why we had to transfer and go to Pālolo School. I think at that time they kind of separated.
- WN: Was that considered a more wealthy district?
- SK: Lili'uokalani School, yeah, they were more on the Chinese area. The grocery store there or like a furniture store. They have business downtown. When we were kids we never did associate too much with the other side. When I say other, Wai'alae Avenue on this side, we always did stay in the valley. So we all grew up in the valley.
- MK: And then you mentioned like scouting.
- SK: Yes, Boy Scouts that's the only one [located] where the fire station is in Kaimukī. Right in the back there, we used to call it, "Bowl," there used to be a bowl over there. That's where we used to have the meeting. It's kind of a, used to be a water reservoir, but by the time I knew, nothing was there. It was just a regular bowl. Like a cement reservoir and Charlie Crane was our scoutmaster, and Ezra Crane. We were Troop 10, and Troop 9, the two brothers. Charlie Crane I think he was in the Board of Supervisors, [City and County of Honolulu]. [Charles Crane was active with the Boy Scouts for forty-five years and served one term as Honolulu's mayor.] Anyway, so that's the only place we walked all the way up for Boy Scouts. That's the only place they had Boy Scouts.
- WN: This is the fire station by Pāhoa [Avenue]?
- SK: Pāhoa, yes, right in the back. They still meet over there, Troop 10. Masao Miyamoto, he was a scoutmaster. He was assistant scoutmaster when we were there because Charlie Crane was the head scoutmaster.
- WN: You mean the bowl is still there?
- SK: Yeah, I think they're still meeting over there. Over seventy years or so, you know.
- MK: So how did you get involved in boy scouting?
- SK: Boy Scouts, well, my older brother was Boy Scout and Roy Tanoue at the *saimin* stand, he and this Hanama Tasaka [author of *Long the Imperial Way*] were the two. They were

older than me, they were just about one or two years older than my older brother, but those two were Boy Scouts, so then we joined them.

MK: And your troop leader was one of the Crane brothers?

SK: They were scoutmasters. Charlie Crane was the scoutmaster for Troop 10, and Ezra Crane was scoutmaster for Troop 9, and Masao Miyamoto [longtime photographer at UH-Mānoa] was the assistant scoutmaster for Troop 10. They were different troops. All the activities were the same thing. But, we joined Troop 10 because that's where Roy Tanoue was from. I joined first as a Cub Scout, and then became a Boy Scout after that.

WN: What rank did you make?

SK: Up to First-Class [rank]. I didn't go beyond that. (Laughs)

WN: Did you go on things like camping trips?

SK: Yes, we used to, the old days. To get First-Class [rank], fourteen-mile hike, we had to go to Hanauma Bay. We used to hike all the way up to Hanauma Bay. That's one of the things, and we used to go camping too. We used to go camp at Hanauma Bay. That's one of the things that I enjoyed, camping.

WN: So when you hiked to Hanauma Bay, was that along the Kalaniana'ole Highway?

SK: Oh yes, all the way up the hill and everything. At that time, even Hanauma Bay we had to walk down. There's no way you can [avoid it]. That's one of the requirements, fourteen-mile hike. We used to hike in Pālolo Valley too. Troop 10 was a good troop, and many of the Pālolo classmates, all went to Troop 10.

MK: In Boy Scouts you folks hiked, you camped.

SK: Yes, and take all the different courses. Of course, from Boy Scout I joined the YMCA. In a way, I left the Boy Scouts and went into YMCA.

MK: So about when did you make that shift from Boy Scout to YMCA?

SK: After I was there about, oh let's see, about sixth grade, they formed the YMCA in Pālolo School, and then we joined the YMCA. So then after that, I kind of let Boy Scout go and joined the YMCA.

MK: And then in the YMCA what kind of activities did you participate in?

SK: It was more or less a kind of educational thing, and then they also had sports, too. We used to play different sports with different YMCA groups. YMCA at that time was not too many, there used to be Nu'uanu Y[MCA], which is the main one [Central YMCA] I remember. We used to go there every so often because they had the swimming pool and they had the gym. But aside from that, it was more on the Christian type of education because our parents, of course, were Christian. But a lot of parents were Buddhist. But we all joined YMCA, and then other ones converted to Christianity. That's one of the main things YMCA did, they taught us Christianity.

MK: I'm curious, at the YMCA, how did they kind of get you interested in Christianity?

SK: Well, Mr. Watada, he was more or less the head of the Kaimukī YMCA. And he visited us in school, he was real nice, real good advisor, so he got us all interested in YMCA work. After school we used to meet at the elementary school, so he used to come there and get all of us together. He always preached different stories about Christians and everything, so that's how we got more interested in YMCA work.

MK: And then some of the fun things was like challenging, you folks used to challenge other YMCA's?

SK: Yes, challenge other YMCA's in basketball, like that. We used to challenge them. The highlight was always to go and visit the Nu'uanu Y, cause all the other places had no gym. You just in the playground, we used to play, so it was kind of a treat when you go play in the gym. And the swimming pool too. Those days, no swimming pool, the only thing we had was out in Waikīkī. [The War Memorial] Natatorium came up a little later, but it was all in the open sea. Never fresh water, so it was a little different.

WN: So Nu'uanu Y was considered to be the top.

SK: For us, yes.

(Laughter)

It's a kind of real treat, you know.

WN: You folks didn't have anything, you didn't have pool, gym.

SK: When they invited us it was a kind of real treat for us, and that was Downtown too.

WN: I was wondering, was Downtown considered far away for your folks?

SK: The only way to get Downtown was streetcars. Downtown was considered far. Of course, when it comes up to Waipahu like that, that was out in the country. Downtown was about the farthest we went. We never did go beyond that. So that's why, we grew up, I'm not familiar with the plantation. Our side, we didn't have any, no more pineapple, no more sugarcane, so we never did grow up in that atmosphere.

MK: And in those days, you have the streetcar, and then you had railroad, yeah?

SK: No, we didn't have railroad. The railroad was only down by 'A'ala, that's where the train station is, and then goes to Kahuku side. We only had streetcar.

MK: Did you folks ever ride the train to go countryside?

SK: Gee, I think maybe I only rode once, I think.

WN: Just a minute.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

- SK: We didn't ride the train because, it's not free either so you had to pay.
- MK: How often did you folks go Downtown?
- SK: Very seldom. Even when we went to high school, you know, McKinley [High School], but that's about as far as we go. We never used to go. I remember as a kid, one time when we went up Aloha Tower. Boy, that was a real treat for us. That was a real treat for us, I remember thinking only once going Downtown and go visit that Aloha Tower, you know.
- MK: Most of your young days were sort of like in the valley.
- SK: Yes. Because if we live out in the plantation, you know maybe we take the train, this and that. Never the chance to ride the train.
- MK: And then I know that after you finished Pālolo School, you went Lili'uokalani.
- SK: Lili'uokalani Intermediate from seventh to ninth grade. I remember at that seventh grade, my parents took me to Japan. I think, so I kind of missed about one half of the seventh grade, but it was a good experience to go to Japan. I came back, then after that I went to eighth grade and ninth grade.
- MK: Who went to Japan?
- SK: Who?
- MK: Yeah, who went with you?
- SK: My father. The parents, two cannot go at that same time. So my father took me, and my older brother stayed home.
- MK: How come you folks went to Japan?
- SK: Well, I guess my father wanted to go visit his mother. And in fact, he brought my grandmother from Japan to live with us for about a year or so. So maybe that was the reason why I went to Japan, to bring her. Get her back, come to visit Hawai'i. We didn't come back together, but I guess he made her arrangement for her to come. I just tagged along at that time. I think that was the reason. My grandmother stayed with us for about a year.
- MK: What did you think of Japan when you went?
- SK: Well, I was about seventh grade, so I was kind of young. But I was impressed with the number of big buildings. At that time, a lot of factories and all those things you don't see in Hawai'i. So I was surprised when I saw all the big construction there. We're from Okayama, so we spend most of our time in Seto, I spend the summer there and just go to visit Okayama City. Never did go to visit Kyoto or Osaka or Tokyo, never had the chance. When I rode the train, I saw the buildings there. I enjoyed because I lived in my grandmother's home and I visited my cousins nearby. I was able to ride the bicycle, so I biked to my cousins' place.
- MK: And then, at that time, did you have to go to school or anything in Japan?

- SK: No, I didn't go to school, but my mother's older sister was also a schoolteacher. So when I used to go visit her, she used to bring the Japanese book and teach me more of the Japanese, but aside from that I didn't go to Japanese school.
- MK: Having grown up in Hawai'i and then being taken to Japan for that trip, what did you think was different or alike?
- SK: No, I didn't think of any different. All I knew was they treated me real well. My grandmother and my mother's sisters, you know. They treated me well. In fact, they taught me how to (get water from) the well. We helped get the water (from the well) for them and then we used to grind the wheat. I used to help them grind it. They used to grind those things with that rock [grinding stone]. I used to help them, but aside from that I don't recall too much.
- WN: Did your father still have that charcoal business?
- SK: Yes, I used to ride along with my uncle at that time. He used to deliver the charcoal (with the bicycle), so I used to tag along with him.
- MK: And then you came back and you joined your friends at Lili'uokalani.
- SK: Yes, eighth and ninth and then went to McKinley.
- MK: And how was it going to Lili'uokalani Intermediate? You're intermediate now.
- SK: Yes, I learned a lot between eighth and ninth grade. English, and math, and science were kind of the prerequisites to high school. I kind of enjoyed the intermediate school. Washington and Central Intermediate were bigger schools than we were. But as I say, we're on this side so we just more or less stayed in the Kaimukī area. We didn't go too much to the other side. Even when we had football, the stadium was in Mōili'ili so we used to either catch the streetcar to Mōili'ili or we used to walk to the stadium. It was a long walk, but we used to do that.
- WN: I would think that going to Lili'uokalani from Pālolo School must have been real different though, with new kids coming in.
- SK: Yes. In the seventh grade, that's when we met a lot of new friends from Wai'alae, Kāhala side. A lot of new friends. It was a good experience. A lot of friends, Chinese too.
- MK: And kids came from as far as Wai'alae, Kāhala, side?
- SK: Yes, it was the only intermediate school. All Kaimukī students had to go Lili'uokalani, either that or else they had to go to Washington, but most of them went to Lili'uokalani. We had three classes—7A, 7B, 7Y. It was a kind of a large class, three classes all the way up to ninth grade.
- MK: And then who were some of the teachers that kind of stick out in your mind from Lili'uokalani?
- SK: Hung Wai Ching's wife, [Elsie]. Mrs. Blaisdell, she just came back, she got married to Neal Blaisdell, the mayor. She taught us, too. Miss Chong I remember because she was my biology teacher. She was good. Mrs. Blaisdell taught us English and Mrs. Ching taught us general science, so I remember those three. So I still see Mrs. Blaisdell every so

often, she's kind of retired now, but she remembers me. I see Hung Wai, but I've never seen his wife. I guess, after they got married she retired, too.

MK: How was the teaching in those days?

SK: They were good teachers. As I say, I learned a lot from them. They were good science teachers.

MK: At Lili'uokalani, what kind of extra-curricular activities did you have back then?

SK: We didn't have any extra-curricular activities at that period, we just took on the regular core study, but at that time they didn't have any outside of that. Of course, they had music, but that's part of their thing. We didn't have any other activity. I guess at that time, they're limited with all the other facilities. I played basketball for the intermediate school. That's about all. Aaron Neff was our captain. He was either six-foot-two or -four. He used to live right near us too, in Pālolo.

MK: And his last name was Neff?

SK: Neff, N-E-F-F. Aaron, later on he went to Kam[ehameha Schools] and he graduated from Kam. He was a referee for the Interscholastic [League of Honolulu]. He and Adrian DeMello. DeMello lived right in Pālolo too, they had a large family. DeMello is one of the Portuguese family I went to school with.

MK: In basketball what position did you play?

SK: I played forward. They have center, forward, and guard, I played forward.

MK: You folks challenged other intermediate students?

SK: Yes, we played all the other schools like Washington, and Central. We didn't win the championship, but we were up there.

WN: When you were going to intermediate school, did you have any idea of what you wanted to be?

SK: No.

WN: Not at all?

SK: I didn't have any idea. Until about junior in high school, I started thinking about it.

MK: And then when you were going to Lili'uokalani Intermediate, did you know that you were going to go high school?

SK: Yes, I knew I was going to go high school and go to college. When high school we're taking all the courses for college. Unfortunately, my good friends too, they couldn't afford to go to college. Because they're not going to college, they didn't take any of those college courses. Most of my friends, right after high school they went to work. Some of them got to be police officers, some of them post office clerks, so they got good jobs right after high school.

MK: So when you entered McKinley High School, what was your course of study?

- SK: I was taking all the core studies. I took math and science, chemistry, physics, all of that to prepare for college.
- MK: What did you think about the core studies those days?
- SK: I guess, I didn't think too much of it myself. I was more interested in science and math. The required courses, and of course ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] too, was required at that time. We had to be in ROTC for two years, that was required.
- MK: What were your feelings about ROTC?
- SK: It was one of the required subjects so we took it for granted. After two years unless you want to continue into ROTC, it's up to you.
- WN: What were your thoughts about going to McKinley? Now you're in the big city, was it a big change for you?
- SK: Yes, it was kind of a big change because all of a sudden you go to McKinley you meet all the different students. At that time there's only McKinley, Roosevelt, 'Iolani, Kam School, and St. Louis. Public schools were Roosevelt and McKinley, there was no Farrington. That was a big change, we met students from all over. Students from Downtown, different places, and I made some good friends. I mean, they were from Washington Intermediate and some from Central [Intermediate]. It was a good experience.
- MK: How did you folks, you know the Pālolo kids, how did you folks compare with all the other kids that came to McKinley?
- SK: Well, for me, because already I had my mind to go to college I was taking courses in science, in math. Whereas most of my other friends, they were not going to go to college. So that's how I kind of met a lot of new friends, you know, in math and in science.
- MK: Sometimes when I talk to people who went to McKinley in the 1930s, they remember a math teacher named Mr. [Frank] Hluboky.
- SK: Hluboky. He taught me, too.
- MK: Yeah. What do you remember about him?
- SK: He just gives you an assignment, and just lets you go at that. To me, Hluboky was more of a football coach. His mind is always on football too, but he's a science teacher, too. He teaches you and gives you the work, but he leaves it all up to you. At that time, our age, McKinley football was big—University of Hawai'i was nothing at that time, so all high school was the main sport. McKinley would challenge against Kam and St. Louis like that, so Hluboky was the head coach. He, and Bert Itoga was the baseball coach, but I didn't play baseball.
- MK: And those were the years that McKinley was really good in a lot of the sports.
- SK: In fact, the year we graduated 1938, that's the year we won championship in every sport. The grand slam we called it. Football, basketball, baseball, and track.
- MK: Were you able to participate?

SK: I was going to play basketball, but my parents said, "You better not practice, you better go to work." That's why I quit. I joined with the intention of playing basketball for McKinley, but my parents insist, "You better go to work and help the store." At that time, the store was getting busy and they needed help, and only my brother and I. My brother was going to college on the Mainland already, so I had to help.

MK: You know, earlier you were saying even from the time you were intermediate you already had it in your mind that you going to go high school and you had it in your mind you were going to go college.

SK: Yes.

MK: How come?

SK: Well, my parents had groomed me to prepare to go to college. From high school time, that's when they tell you, you got to get prepared. Up until ninth grade, I knew I was going to high school, but I never did put any emphasis in preparing for college.

MK: And then your older brother, how much older was he?

SK: He was two years older. So when I was getting sophomore, he was already a senior at McKinley. I just got in, so we didn't have too much in common already.

MK: And he went to college.

SK: He went to college, yes. That's why I followed him afterwards. He went to University of California, Berkeley.

WN: Who emphasized education more, your father or your mother?

SK: My mother. I guess being a former schoolteacher and more educated. My father never did have much education, so he never really pushed us.

MK: Earlier we spoke a little bit about Mr. Hluboky, your math teacher, who were some of the other teachers that maybe you remember things about?

SK: Ms. Hockley, she was our core study teacher. One of the things I remember about core study, we used to go visit [Honolulu] Academy of Arts, get a little bit of culture. So we used to walk from McKinley to Academy of Arts. But aside from that Hluboky, Ms. Hockley, and there's one more. Gosh, I can't think of his name, it's an old man. He was our science teacher. What's his name, now? He's been there for a long time. I mean, he was a chemistry teacher. What was his name? Gosh, I can't think of his name. He was good though, he was really good. He really taught all the fundamental chemistry, so when I went to college it was easy. I mean, it wasn't easy, but was easier because I was well prepared. He was a good chem teacher. Some schools, they have chem teacher, but they're not as good as this guy. What's his name now? (Mr. Dorsey.)

MK: And those days, the principal was Miles Cary?

SK: Miles Cary, yes.

MK: What contact did you have with him?

- SK: I didn't have too much with him though. Because I never did get into any of the officer positions, but he seemed fair. And [educator] Dr. Dai Ho Chun, he's from right in Pālolo, so I used to ride with him to McKinley. He used to take me too, but I never did have any class with him. I know he used to handle the *Daily Pinion* [school newspaper] in McKinley, and then later on he went to University of Hawai'i. We were very close friends because he lived right in Pālolo and his sisters and brothers all went to University of Hawai'i.
- WN: When you say core studies, what was that?
- SK: That's English. Strictly English, English and literature, old history and English. Mostly going back to old history and the different cultures. And they didn't go too much into fundamental English. We should know the verb, adverb. That's why we used to visit the Academy of Arts, for different culture.
- MK: In those days, did McKinley still have the McKinley Citizenship Club?
- SK: Yes, MCC. I didn't get in though.
- MK: Were you active in any of the other clubs?
- SK: No, we were just in the YMCA club in there, too.
- MK: The Hi-Y Club.
- SK: Hi-Y Club, yes. Aside from that I didn't get too much, after high school I got back to the grocery store, so I didn't get too much. So high school, I worked at the store, so I didn't get too much outside activities.
- MK: How did you feel because your parents asked you, they told you, you couldn't do basketball, we need your help at the store. You have to come home right after school to help at the store.
- SK: Yes.
- MK: How did you feel as a teenager?
- SK: I felt that I had to help because we had no other family members. Just my brother and I, so nobody else to help in the store. My parents worked from early in the morning to late at night, so we used to help with the deliveries. In a way, tried to make the job a little easier. I never had no feeling that I was forced to work, but I figure I got to help. I worked all through high school, helping in the store.
- MK: In those days, did you get any pay or spending money?
- SK: No. They gave me money if I needed, but we never had any kind of a spending money to really spend, you know.
- MK: It was more on the need basis then.
- SK: As you need, yes.

- MK: When you graduated McKinley High School, we know that you went to Sacramento JC [Junior College].
- SK: I couldn't get in Cal [University of California, Berkeley] because I lacked a course in science that I had to take. I don't know if it was Chem 1A, or one of them anyway. So that was required at Cal, so I took that at Sacramento JC and then transferred to Cal.
- MK: How come you went to Sacramento JC and not someplace else?
- SK: Well, my brother knew friends at Sacramento. I was going to go to San Francisco State College to finish the one year, but since my brother was in Berkeley, he's kind of lonely so he said, "Why don't you go to Sacramento?" Because he had couple of good friends at Sacramento JC so he told them, "Hey, my brother gonna go, so you take care of him." So that's how I went to Sacramento JC.
- MK: Who were those friends that were kind of asked to take care of you?
- SK: This guy, he's a dentist, Sasaki. I don't know whether he passed away or not.
- MK: Is that Tsutomu Sasaki?
- SK: He's a dentist.
- WN: Was he from Waikīkī?
- SK: No, I thought he was from Kaka'ako side. I don't know. It's not Richard Sasaki, because I know he's the policeman.
- MK: Richard Sasaki yeah.
- WN: Is that the brother?
- MK: That's the other Sasaki family.
- SK: The other Sasaki family, yeah.
- MK: There was a Tsutomu Sasaki that was a dentist and he went to Okumura Boarding Home and was from a Christian family, Waikīkī.
- SK: Gee, I don't think his name was Tsutomu though, I'm not too sure. John Nakahara is another one that's a good friend, so that's why I went to Sacramento. And there was another, Kuwahara, not Mike, but his older brother. He passed away too, but they were good friends with my brother. Those three, so it made it easier for me to go to Sacramento.
- MK: Was that your first trip to the Mainland?
- SK: Yes. So you can kind of get homesick, that's why when you see other Hawai'i friends, then they kind of made it easy.
- WN: Was University of Hawai'i an option for you?

SK: Well, since my brother went to Cal I figured, I rather go to the Mainland instead of stay close to home. Instead of going to UH [University of Hawai'i], I tell them I'd rather go to the Mainland.

WN: Was it about this time that you had an idea of what you wanted to do?

SK: Yes, just about that kind of period, you know. Still undecided, but because when I went to Cal there's a lot of dental friends of mine too. I lived with a couple of them. They were from the Mainland, but my good friend was Masa Uesato, he passed away. His older brother is George Uesato, he's a dentist, and [Bunkichi] "Bunky" Uesato is the oldest one. We're good friends, but Masa and I went to Cal together. The war started, so he went to Washington University, and unfortunately he had cirrhosis of the liver. Senior year, when he was ready to graduate, he passed away. Senior year in dental school, he was my close friend when I went to Cal.

END OF TAPE ONE

TAPE NO. 37-4-2-01; SIDE ONE

MK: I was wondering in those days, what was the trip like going up to the Mainland for college? How did you get to the Mainland?

SK: Well, my brother took me with him. So going over, I didn't feel too homesick, but as soon as he went to Cal, I went to Sacramento JC, but before that I was going to go to San Francisco State College. That kind of made me homesick. I wouldn't say it was a foreign country, but everything was new. San Francisco is new, so I stayed with him in Cal until I went to Sacramento. It was a sort of lonely feeling though. But when I went to Sacramento, these guys like Sasaki took care of me, so I felt comfortable.

MK: And then coming from Hawai'i going to the mainland junior college, how was the adjustment?

SK: Well, the adjustment wasn't too bad because as I said, I had friends going to Sacramento JC, so I tagged along with them. They watched over me. Make sure everything was right. Later on, at Sacramento JC I met Masa Uesato and he knew Kiki Ryugo, that's my brother-in-law and this guy, Barney Kubota. Because Masa stayed with Barney Kubota, he and Kiki were very close friends. Masa said, "Why don't you stay over at Ryugos", because then you don't have to stay with the boys in downtown" I mean, in Sacramento because then at that time, we had to eat out and we had to do our own wash and everything. Talked to Kiki, and Kiki said, "Oh yeah, we'll be able to board you." And that's how the thing got started and I boarded at the Ryugos', and that's how I met Minnie. But it's through Masa and Kiki, it's a coincidence.

MK: And I'm wondering, how much did you pay to board at the Ryugos'?

SK: Wasn't too much. I cannot recall. Was kind of reasonable though, because the Ryugos' had a vegetable wholesaler and I guess whatever old vegetables they could always bring it home and have enough food to board somebody. I went there and then later on Charlie Yogi stayed there with me too at the Ryugos'. And Charlie Yogi, he retired, but he used to be the manager at Times Supermarket, Wai'alae, Kāhala.

MK: And so when you boarded at the Ryugos' place, you got meals, a place to stay, anything else?

SK: And I think they did my underwear, too.

(Laughter)

So you know, so they made it easy for me.

WN: What was Minnie doing at the time?

SK: She was going to high school. Most of the Hawai'i students, or whatever, all had to move out of California. Either because they all go into [internment] camp or something. There were quite a few Hawai'i boys working for Matson on the Matson freights and they got stuck in San Francisco. They cannot go back, so they had to go to camp, too.

WN: We'll get into the war, the camp next time.

MK: Maybe we should end here, it's almost eleven, and then we'll continue with WWII and Berkeley.

WN: That'll be interesting.

MK: We really want to ask you about the World War II period and Berkeley.

WN: One question is, I know you said once that your mother was the one who suggested that you go into pharmacy.

SK: Pharmacy, yes.

WN: When was this?

SK: That was while I was going to high school and when I was working in the grocery store too. My mother is always trying, she's a good businesswoman, so she says because there was Stewart's Pharmacy and all this kind of drugstores on Wai'ala Avenue, she said, "They make more money than the grocery store, so why don't you take up pharmacy and open up a drugstore." So, that's how she gave me that idea.

WN: How did you feel about that idea?

SK: I thought that was pretty good, because I grew up in grocery store, so I know the business. So I say, well, all I do is take up pharmacy and get a pharmacy license, you can open a drugstore. So, then I kind of made up my mind that eventually I'll open up a drugstore.

MK: And then, your brother had already started college, what did she suggest to your brother?

SK: He took up business. Later on he worked for Island Insurance on the business side. He was more on the financial side. Later on, when he came back, he was working at the grocery store, but he didn't really care too much for the retail business. I kind of enjoyed the retail business, so he went into finance. I kind of worked in the grocery store, until later on I came back and opened up the drugstore. See then, my parents helped me, and

that was a good background because ABC Store is right now grocery, drugs, and I had a good combination.

WN: Do you think that your mother and father's plan was to have you and your brother go away to college and come back and continue the store?

SK: No, I guess [the plan was] for my brother to kind of take over the store, but he didn't like it too much. So, actually later on, when I came back as I said, I worked in the drugstore for Benson Smith [& Co.], I was in the retail. My parents finally said, since my brother's not going to run the grocery, so we leased it out to the Yoshioka and Hata family. So they took over the grocery store, and later on I opened up the Kaimukī pharmacy. As I said, I had a good background in groceries, and good background in the drug business, so put them all together and made it into an ABC Store.

WN: Okay, we'll stop here for today.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape Nos. 37-5-3-01 and 37-6-3-01

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sidney Kosasa (SK)

Honolulu, Hawai'i

September 14, 2001

BY: Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is the third interview with Mr. Sidney Kosasa on September 14, 2001 and we're at his office in Kaka'ako, O'ahu. The interviewers are Michi Kodama-Nishimoto and Warren Nishimoto.

MK: Okay, for today's interview, we're going to take you back in time and we're going to start talking about your days at [University of California] Berkeley. Now, you [first] went to Sacramento JC [Junior College for one year] . . .

SK: That's when I transferred to UC [University of California] School of Pharmacy and that was in San Francisco. So, that's where we stayed for three years—sophomore, junior, and senior. And the senior year, the war broke out in December 7, 1941. I graduated 1942, but I took my final exam in April—end of April really. We evacuated. All the San Francisco area, everybody [i.e., persons of Japanese ancestry] had to move out. I mean, they had to go into an assembly center. In fact, San Francisco [residents] went to Tanforan. They used to have a racetrack there and they stayed over there. People down south, USC [University of Southern California] area, they had to go to Santa Anita racetrack over there. So then instead of my going to Tanforan, I went to Sacramento. [It] was another month before Sacramento got evacuated. Sacramento is about a hundred miles inside of San Francisco, so that's why I felt I might as well go over there in Sacramento before going to camp.

MK: You know, going back a little bit, when you left Sacramento JC and you started your . . .

SK: UC pharmacy.

MK: . . . pharmacy, UC, what did it take to get into the school of pharmacy?

SK: You had to get at least a B average, B or better, to get into it because at that time, too, we only had about twenty-eight students in the school of pharmacy, so it was kind of hard to get in. Especially, during that period, 1938–40 period in California [where] they had racial prejudice against the Japanese. So even at Cal, limited amount of Japanese could get in, especially in the medical field. Medicine, dental, pharmacy, nursing, only took so many Orientals.

MK: So in your day, how many of that twenty-eight were Asian?

SK: There were about eight of us, but I was the only (one) from Hawai'i. One (student) was from San Francisco, but the others were from Fresno area. So I roomed with a [person from] Fresno, Yoshi Mochizuki, he and I roomed together because he had to board, too. So he and I boarded together. In other words, we call it, "Batch," at that time. We get an apartment, we used to cook, ourselves. Since we were classmates together, it was easy. The classes we took are the same.

MK: You said that in those days there was some prejudice against Orientals, how did you know that it was there? Was there like a quota or . . . ?

SK: Well, not only that, in San Francisco the only place we could stay is—right now they have the Japanese town, that's where we stayed. It was a kind of restricted area because if we tried to go to some other area, they said no. No vacancy. I remember, personally, I went to one of the nicer apartment areas. I thought I'd get an apartment, they had a vacancy sign. So I went over there, they said, "No, I'm sorry it's all taken." Then one week later, I still see the vacancy sign.

So I went up there, I told him, "If it's filled, why don't you take the vacancy sign off?" But it was like that. That's how we were restricted. I think by my junior year I wanted to work in one of the—I don't remember if it was Walgreens. I think it was Walgreens Drug Store on Market Street downtown and I applied for a job because a couple of my *Haole* friends, Italian (students), they were working in the drugstore. So I figure, well, maybe I'll try. Didn't get a job in the drugstore. They say, "Sorry, we cannot hire you because all our customers are [White], so we cannot." There were a couple of drug stores in Japanese town—"Why don't you go apply for a job over there?"

But that shows you at that time they didn't like Orientals working. In fact, they say, "Our customers all White," so they don't like to have an Oriental wait on them. Then during the war period, too, in San Francisco the Chinese had an "I am a Chinese American" big badge. They had that badge so that they could differentiate us from the Chinese. I mean, that's during wartime, there was strong prejudice. So all the Japanese, they all stayed in Japanese town. All the way from Hawai'i, we never had that kind of a racial discrimination, but we found that out when we. . . . Yeah.

WN: Was there any kind of discrimination at Berkeley?

SK: Well, it was the same thing. Try to find housing, you cannot get housing. My brother stayed at the International House, but you cannot get outside [i.e., off-campus] place. There was strong prejudice against the Japanese American at that period. When the war started, they didn't trust us. In fact, the general [General John DeWitt], said "Once a Jap, is always a Jap."

We never used to hear the word, "Jap." Back here [in Hawai'i], we don't say that, but that's how strong the prejudice was. That's why when the war started we all had to go into camp. While we were in school we had no problem. The professors, they all treated us fair and everything, we had no problem.

MK: In your mixing with Whites or other Asians on campus, when you were a student before the war, how was that?

SK: Well, the ones I knew, those Asians from California, they already knew the prejudice. They grew up, you know, being in California. But we didn't have that prejudice feeling. I

never did have any kind of antagonism against anybody, so that's how I made a lot of good friends. I had classmates, *Haole*. Even now they call me up. Good friends. That's why I remember in the senior year, this guy was an Italian and one guy was kind of a German guy. So I asked them, "How come we got to get evacuated and you guys don't get evacuated?" (Chuckles) But that's what it was, they were *Haole*. California was very, very prejudiced during that period.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

MK: We were just talking about the racial prejudice you experienced in California.

SK: So we stayed together, but it was in Japanese town that we lived together in an apartment. We couldn't go to the better area. That's why even right now we have the Japanese town in San Francisco.

MK: What was your apartment like in Japanese town with Mochizuki?

SK: We just had one bedroom, and we had a kitchen, and we had the bathroom. It was just a one-bedroom, although it was twin beds, but it was one-bedroom. We had a desk, but it was still only one-bedroom. (Chuckles)

MK: And then, in those days, who did the cooking, the washing, all that?

SK: We did our own, and since he and I were in the (same class), we took the labs, everything, together. So when the final exams, we all go out to eat. We don't want to cook. Otherwise, he and I, we cooked together, alternately. He's from Fresno, so they had a fruit farm. We were able to get the fruit from them. They [family] all used to send it to him, so we didn't have to buy any fruits. There was a grocery store, Japanese grocery store, we used to buy our things over there.

And then later on, he and I, we moved into a kind of a home where a Japanese family had a cleaning and washing [service], and they were able to board about eight of us. So, from that apartment, we moved into the boardinghouse there. He and I, same thing, we shared a room together. So it was kind of cheap. But at that time, then they did the washing for us.

MK: How about the cooking?

SK: They cooked for us, too, at that time. It was like a boardinghouse. So junior and senior year we lived over there.

WN: Was that boardinghouse all Japanese?

SK: Yes. All Japanese, all students. There were two dental students with us, too. All Japanese. He [Mochizuki] and I were the two pharmacists. There's one other (person), Ernest Nagata. There was a mortician school in San Francisco, so he was going to that school. Interesting, he made kind of a model and put it on the bed. (Chuckles) It looked like a regular (person). . . .

WN: Corpse?

SK: Yeah, corpse like.

(Laughter)

WN: How did you get along with the Japanese from the Mainland? Did you feel different from them?

SK: Yes. They weren't outward. They didn't associate with outsiders too much, with the *hakujin*, like that. We had no prejudice, so we felt very comfortable talking to them. But I noticed that the Mainland Japanese, they only stick together with the Japanese. They don't—you know. But being from Hawai'i we felt comfortable, but when I went to San Francisco we knew we were restricted. You cannot go—in fact, I read one time that Senator Dan Inouye, he went to get a haircut in San Francisco in downtown, they didn't want to cut his hair. Told him, "Go to Japanese town, go cut your hair." That's how strong the prejudice [was on the Mainland]. We never did try to go outside because we know they don't like the Japanese. But, of course, times have changed since that war. But that's the reason why we were all evacuated. All the Japanese were evacuated, whether you were an American citizen or not, we all had to go.

MK: I was wondering, in those days, you folks are all young Japanese American guys going to college, living on your own, what did you folks do for fun, your social life?

SK: There was a YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association], too, and it was mostly for the Japanese Americans. It was right in Japanese town. So they used to have a basketball tournament. The medical group, we had a basketball team, so we used to play. Even at Cal, they had a little outdoor basketball court, but that's about all we can do. There was no football, no baseball. Although from San Francisco I took a physics course in Berkeley, but that's the only course I had in Berkeley. The rest was all in pharmacy school. That's where we had the UC medical center over there. The medical, dental, nursing, and pharmacy, that's the medical center. We used to have [an] old building, that's where we used to have our lab. And then later on they built a nice big medical building in San Francisco. That's right now. The pharmacy is on the sixteenth floor, I think.

WN: So you were actually at the University of California at San Francisco?

SK: Yes.

WN: For your pharmacy classes.

SK: Pharmacy class.

WN: But you're enrolled at Berkeley?

SK: Yes, but now they changed it. They call it [UC] medical center now, but in our period we were part of UC Berkeley. That's why my diploma is [from] Berkeley. Then later on, they changed it to [UC] medical center. But at that time, everybody, we were still part of UC Berkeley.

MK: And then, in addition to your playing basketball at the Y and with your medical group, did you do other socializing?

SK: They still have it here, they call it JACL [Japanese American Citizens League]. Not too very strong in Hawai'i, but they used to sponsor dances every so often at the Japanese YMCA there. But not too often. They only have it when they have a convention or

something, then they have dances. They invited us to attend. It was a kind of open thing. But, it wasn't like in the medical center that we had dancing [and socializing]. Although they had different, what you call it, not chapters, but [fraternity and] sorority like that, but Japanese especially in California, you cannot join in any of the groups. So actually, we didn't have. The JACL was the only kind of organization function that we had. That was, as I say, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Jose, they're all different JACL.

San Francisco had a JACL, but not too strong. But there was a fellow, Saburo Kido. He was formerly from Hawai'i. But he was an attorney and he was practicing in San Francisco. And Mike Masaoka, too, of JACL at that time. I remember he contacted me, Mike Masaoka. We had to pull out of the area and before evacuation, we had a few days so we had to go someplace. So we stayed at one of the hotels. Mike Masaoka, we were all together. That's how I got to know Mike Masaoka. Of course, I don't know what happened to Kido. They were already practicing so he must be ninety-something already. Mike Masaoka too, they were all graduated, they were ahead of me. They were heads of JACL, so we got to know them.

MK: You mentioned like Saburo Kido originally came from Hawai'i. What other Hawai'i people did you still have some contact with when you were going to college?

SK: I didn't have too many because not too many went to Cal, most of them went to USC. There's Dr. Uesato, Bunki[chi], he went into dental school. Through him, I got to know a couple of his friends, and his younger brother. That's, as I say, Masa Uesato, we stayed together. We didn't have hardly anybody from Hawai'i. Most of them were down USC, so whenever we had football game [at Cal], they'd come up or we'd go down there. USC was so strong that we always took a beating in football.

(Laughter)

I only went once, but they used to have a *gakuseikai*, they call it, in USC. Katsumi Kometani and [others] formed a group. They bought a nice big home, kind of an apartment like—actually it's a home divided among [them]. That's where the Hawai'i boys used to stay there while going to USC. So we went down to play USC, we drove down there, but we stayed with them, and we bunked with them. Most of the friends that we knew, they were at USC. Of course, my brother was at Berkeley, so he and I, we drove down—I don't know whether he had a car, we drove down all the way from Berkeley to Los Angeles, that's about eight hours' ride.

WN: What was considered the more prestigious school at that time, USC or Berkeley?

SK: Berkeley. The prestigious one was Stanford. But Stanford and Cal, we have a rivalry. Anyway, at the football game, we always had big rivalry between Stanford and Cal. USC, it was a private school, whereas Berkeley is a public school. So the only competition we had was with Stanford. I didn't know anybody at Stanford at that time, but there was a Stanford medical school down in San Francisco. I know because they had the medical library there and we used to go over there to study. A lot of medical books were available at Stanford library. That was in San Francisco.

MK: Academically, how hard were the studies at pharmacy school?

SK: It was not easy because it was strictly chemistry, practically all chemistry. Sophomore and junior years were strictly organic chemistry. Only senior year, then we got into, more

or less, the pharmacy side. We learned how to dispense and manufacture drugs. One of the courses was manufacture pharmacy. In other words, we used to make aspirin and cough syrup. We used to make it for the university hospital. We supply all the phenobarbital and all those. We used to make it, and then we used to supply the hospital as part of the course, too. Cough syrup, like that. They don't waste it, so they gave it to the UC hospital. That's where the medical and nursing were, all over there.

MK: So when you were a student, like how many hours a day did you have to study? How hard was it?

SK: It was a full course you had to take. Afternoon, you stayed until about five o'clock because we always get lab work. You take the course, and the afternoon, it's lab work. So that's why Yoshi Mochizuki and I were best together because we get through the lab and then we go home together. The courses all the same, so it's not you go choose whatever you want. Ours were all required, you have to take it.

MK: It was a set program.

SK: Oh, yes. Every class. One or two guys, upperclassmen, we all stayed, more or less, in the Japanese town. They gave us the exam of the previous years. (MK laughs.) It's not the same, but a general thing. So this is for us to review. These *hakujin* had those—what do you call? Not sorority, but what?

WN and MK: Fraternity.

SK: Fraternity, yes. All those guys had the advantage over us because they all had all the things [i.e., previous examinations]. We didn't have any of it except for the guys that we knew. (Chuckles) But it was a full course though, at Cal. I know at Cal, the curriculum, they were all tough compared to some other pharmacy schools. Physical chemistry, like that, they don't have that at some. My daughter, Gloria, went to University of Michigan. But her courses, too, were not as much as we had when I was going to Cal. It was a lot of lab work we had to do in organic chemistry, physical chemistry, pharmaceutical chemistry. And every one had lab. After that, we had to study at night. One of my classmates, Mochizuki, sometimes he stayed up all night.

I tell him, "Hey, you didn't go sleep?"

He said, "No, I didn't sleep."

(Chuckles) I cannot study to that late hour. I get sleepy. I go to sleep and I rather study early in the morning.

MK: In those days while you were a student, were you also working, too?

SK: No, at that time, as I say, we couldn't get any job so we just had to [economize]. But we were able to get this school pass for streetcar. They only give to high school students, so you got to get high school streetcar pass. I knew this place where we stayed, [students] were going to Lowell High School. So we were able to get the high school [pass] because they cannot tell—the Japanese—they cannot tell whether you old or not.

(Laughter)

So we used the high school [pass] for all three years. That was real cheap because I think it was only ten cents or something a ride. So you buy coupons for, I think about twenty coupons for a dollar. So every time you go they punch it out. Lowell [High] School was right near the medical center, so we were able to get there. That saved us a lot of money.

MK: So how did you support yourself during your college days?

SK: My parents sent me some money, the tuition and things, but the rest we worked part time. Summertime especially, we work out in the field.

MK: So summertime, where did you work?

SK: We were working in, they call it Vacaville. That's up in the mountains, a lot of pears.

WN: What did you do?

SK: We used to go pick those pears. First, you get to know the size of the pears, so they give us a ring. But later on, we know the size so we don't need the ring. They pay you by the box, so the old-timers, they're fast, so they fill up the box. The old-timers, they pick up all the fruits [ahead of us], so we got to go hunt around. It took us quite a while to fill a box. But they were full-time workers. But there was enough trees. The better trees, they go ahead. Those were the good experiences we had.

MK: How did you get a job picking pears?

SK: I cannot recall how, but they have it right in town that you could apply for it. Summertime, just like the pineapple field [in Hawai'i], they have an area. I don't know how we did, but we were able to find jobs there, so they told us where to go.

MK: In those days, what kinds of people worked at the pear . . .

SK: Most of them were Japanese. They had the farms up there, so we were able to work. Japanese had a lot of farms around there. All the fruit farms. The lucky guys, they worked down, more or less, Napa Valley side, but that's hard to find job over there. That's where they had the grapes and all that, and that was a cool area. We worked up in the mountains, and they were hot, summertime especially. Some guys worked on the asparagus farms, too. I didn't work asparagus, that's hard work because it's around the ground.

WN: Did you climb ladders to pick pears?

SK: Oh yes. We get a fourteen-foot ladder, boy. First time we get a heck of a time, but eventually we knew how to.

MK: Where did you live when you were working?

SK: They had a kind of a cottage. It's just kind of a room. But they fed us, too. We were able to bunk together and work. They provided for the workers, nothing fancy, but just a room and bed.

WN: And meals, too?

SK: They provided the meals.

MK: Were they Japanese meals or . . .

SK: Yes, Japanese. I don't know who they are, but a lot of guys, after the war, they made money because of the development in California. A lot of subdivisions came up. In fact, my roommate Yoshi Mochizuki, he was from Fresno, they had a grape farm. They're out in the sticks at that time. But after the war—unfortunately, he passed away—but the land they had, the developers wanted to buy the whole area, so I think they sold part of it. They kept part of it. I know that in San Jose area, too, used to be nothing but fruit orchards, now it's all homes. So those that had the land there, they were able to hang on to the land even in evacuation, so when they came back they still owned it. There were not too many, but those that had the land, they're millionaires.

WN: How much did you get paid for picking pears?

SK: (Chuckles) I cannot even recall how much we got paid because we just had barely enough to survive. But it was mostly on the time because we had summer vacation so we had to work and kill time before school starts. Money wasn't too much, as long as we got room and board. So until school started. We started in end of (May), we get through in (August), so during that period.

MK: Did you go back to the same farm year after year?

SK: No, go to different farms. All depends on what job is available. I remember I had to cut Masa Uesato's hair. It was long already, he didn't have a chance to get into town to go get a haircut, so he told me go cut his hair. I try to cut his hair, but I couldn't trim them down (chuckles). But I cut it. Looks like a *chawan* haircut.

(Laughter)

I told him, "At least I cut your hair." I couldn't trim it down. I didn't know how. (Laughs) I couldn't taper it down. It was some experience, though.

WN: Were you homesick at all?

SK: The first year, yes, I was homesick, but second year like that, I got used to it. I made a lot of Hawai'i friends and everything.

MK: So the summertime, you never had a chance to come home?

SK: I came home one year. That's the year I was lucky because I had to report, register for the draft. My draft board was in Hawai'i, and that was a chance of luck, though.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: So you were saying that one summer you got to come back to Hawai'i. Having been away, you're on the Mainland you're seeing the big city, San Francisco, Sacramento. You come back to Hawai'i, what did you think of Hawai'i when you came back?

SK: I didn't think too much about it. Only nice part of it is, I got to meet my old friends again. Of course, we had a grocery store and I helped in the grocery store until I had to go back. But aside from that, I didn't think any more different because Hawai'i and California is the same thing, language and everything. I didn't feel anything different. Only it made me feel good because I get to see my friends again.

MK: Your friends, what were they doing in their lives over here?

SK: Well, let me see. One was a policeman, one was a postal clerk, they were all working for the government or something. But nobody was in any kind of a retail business, so most of them, as I said, they were working. When I came back, I used to play golf with them, too. We used to have the Pālolo Golf Course at that time, so that and the Ala Wai Golf Course we play golf together. They grew up caddying. But aside from that, I didn't do anything special.

MK: And then after that summer, you went back, continued your schooling.

SK: Yes, my schooling, until the war broke out.

MK: When December 7, 1941 came, what were you doing?

SK: This one fellow from San Francisco in pharmacy school with me, he lived in San Francisco. That was a Sunday so I went to visit him. He tells me, "Hey, did you know that Japan bombed Hawai'i?"

I said, "No, cannot be. Japan wouldn't bomb Hawai'i."

"But that's what it says on the radio. That's what came in on the radio."

And sure enough, on the radio it says that the Japanese planes bombed Pearl Harbor and that's the first thing I found out about it. But I didn't think too much about it, I mean, because they said they're going to declare war. But already we were in school, so I didn't think too much about it. As the news start getting around, that they're going to start the evacuation and all that stuff, then I started getting a little worried whether we be able to graduate or not.

But, as I said, fortunately the dean was pretty good, so about eight of us Japanese Americans, he says, "We'll let you take your final exam in April." So we took it. Then we left school before the school ended. So later on when I went to Tule Lake [Internment Camp], then they mailed me the diploma in camp. That's how I got my diploma in camp.

But, I know one incident was that, my roommate from Fresno and a couple of other friends, before they put the restriction—I think they had a five-mile restriction you cannot get out of San Francisco—before they put that thing, say, hey, we better go visit relatives. So I don't know whose car it is, but we drove all the way down to Fresno. Mochizuki met his family and everything. Then the same night, we had to come back again. That, I remember, took us about four hours to get there and four hours back. That was at night, we went. That was some experience though. About four of us went, too. I was the only one from Hawai'i, but Mochizuki and two other guys from Fresno visited their family. I can't recall how, but anyway we got back together to go back the same night. And after that, they put the restriction. I couldn't even get to Berkeley because it was more than five miles away. One or two miles away, anyway, we cannot. In other words, we were restricted from going anywhere.

WN: That was everybody or was it just Japanese?

SK: All the Japanese Americans, yes. So we were kind of stuck until—then they start giving notice on evacuation. No, that's right, we went into the hotel. We were on the other side of the street. They said, "On this side of the street, this week you're going to be evacuated." So we on this side of the street. So we moved over to the other side. We stayed for a few more weeks because we're still going to school. We wanted to be sure that at least we could get as much education out of the thing. But they were divided up by different districts. So by the time when they say we got to go then, I say, "I'm going to Sacramento." Because by then already, restriction.

There was some other Hawai'i boys that were on the Matson ship. They were stuck in San Francisco. I don't know where they went to, but they called it the assembly center. From the assembly center we went to the relocation camps.

So Sacramento, we went to this Walerga Assembly Center. From there, by that time they built the barracks in Tule Lake, then we moved all over there. Not only us from California, but I know we met some Washington people. There were quite a few people from Washington (and Oregon at Tule Lake).

That's the time they had all the different relocation camps. Down south people went Heart Mountain or some other area, they all went to different areas. But the Sacramento area, we went to Tule Lake. And then, from there we met some Washington people also at Tule Lake. How I got to know them is when they put up the medical building, there were a couple of other pharmacy students from Washington. And then, there were quite a few stevedores from Hawai'i. I don't know what assembly center they were from, but from the assembly center they went to this relocation camp, Tule Lake. That's how we met some of the Hawai'i boys over there. We didn't know them, but they said they were on the Matson ships.

MK: Before they started evacuating you folks to the assembly center, did you experience any incidents because you're Japanese and the war started?

SK: We were very, very cautious. We didn't go out at all. We just stayed around because they were prejudiced. You don't know who might attack the Japanese Americans. So we stayed close by, we didn't go out at all at night. We just stayed there until. . . . Then the evacuation notice came out. There came a notice, when you going be evacuated. And when my area came out, I said, "I'm going to Sacramento." So I was able to go to Sacramento.

WN: Did anybody come up to you, or did you have any incidences of prejudice, you know, calling you names or anything like that?

SK: At that time, when the war started, we were really restricted. You couldn't go out at night or anything. I cannot recall too much, but I know I was lucky. I say I'm lucky, I was a student. But those that had businesses in San Francisco, they all lost the business. They all had to move out.

MK: Like the boardinghouse owners, yeah?

SK: I don't know where they went to. They went to Tanforan [Assembly Center], though, I know. That's the assembly center first. So I went to Sacramento.

MK: What did you know about your family back in Hawai'i? What were your feelings about . . .

SK: Well, the only way, I think, communication by letter. But aside from that I don't recall because I don't think the telephone was really available at that time, so it was mostly by letter. But I wrote to my parents that I'm going to go with the Ryugos, and stay in Sacramento. Around then, I went to Tule Lake. But of course, at that time, too, I only had one older brother. When the 442nd [Regimental Combat Team] started, you know, they came out, too. When they formed the 442nd and 100th [Infantry Battalion], that's when they relaxed [restrictions] in the Tule Lake relocation center. They are going to allow, if you get a job outside, you can go out. So we stayed in the camp for about one year. When they said you could go out, you have to get a job. Otherwise, you cannot get out of the camps.

So, at that time, I got married already. We wrote---Minnie wrote to about fifty hospitals all over the country if there's a job available for a pharmacist. But I always made sure that [they know] I am an American of Japanese ancestry, so they don't get no surprises. A lot of them answered. I got some nasty letters at that time. They said, why should they hire a Japanese when we're at war against them, so we don't need any. But Barnes Hospital [i.e., Barnes-Jewish Hospital] was one of the few. Barnes Hospital and, I think, Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago, they were two that said they'll accept me. But I went to Barnes Hospital because, as I say, to make a long story short, those dental students at UC Dental [School], they were able to transfer to Washington University in St. Louis because a professor at that UC Dental School, I think, became the head of the Washington University Dental School there. So they were kind of tied in together. When the war broke out, those that had to finish up and those that went to Cal, they were lucky. They were able to get in. But a lot of medical students, they couldn't get into any other medical school on the Mainland for a long time because they wouldn't take any Japanese American.

But the reason why I chose Barnes Hospital, as I said, this guy Tom Hiura from dental school at UC, he was accepted to Washington University so he stayed at a dorm in St. Louis. I wrote to him, I said, "Hey, from camp I'm going to send my belongings to you, so that when you receive it, you keep it there because I got a job at Barnes Hospital there in St. Louis." Barnes Hospital and Washington University, they were affiliated together, see. So when I went to St. Louis, I got my belongings there, then I looked around for an apartment, found an apartment. We stayed in a hotel for about two days or so before looking for an apartment. They gave us, I don't know how much, forty-five dollars or something like that. The government gave us to move out. So we were able to move out, stayed at the hotel, and then I found a job. Of course, I had a job at Barnes Hospital, so I started working over there.

WN: So backing up little bit, when you thought of, you know, you had to be evacuated, what was going through your mind at that time as to, did you ever think, "Why is this happening?"

SK: Well, we all had the feeling that we are American citizens, why should we be evacuated? But at that time, it's a war period. They were prejudiced against any Japanese, whether you were Japanese American or whatnot. Even the general, he said, "Once a Jap, is always a Jap." So they didn't trust the Japanese. That's the reason why we had to be evacuated. But as I said, I was lucky because I didn't have any ties. I was a student, so all I had to do is move out. But those that had families and like my wife's side, they all had

to close up [their business]. Fortunately, they owned their home. They know the neighbors, so they told their neighbor to take care their home and the property, which they did, which was nice.

WN: I'm assuming you went to Sacramento so that you could be with Minnie.

SK: One thing is true, Sacramento, then at least I have a place with a family to move out to. Otherwise, I would've been going to camp in San Francisco. So I figured I rather go with the family that I knew.

WN: You didn't have any problems going to Sacramento? Nobody tried to stop you?

SK: No. The government didn't care, as long as you're going to move out—say, if this is December the 14th, you're going to move out—as long as you move out of that San Francisco on the 14th, they don't care. A lot of them, they didn't go to relocation [camp], they went outside of California, Idaho, or Chicago. Those that wanted to go out, they went out. But those not going to go outside of the Nevada area, well, you got to go into relocation camp. That's why most of them are, well, except like I said, like Tom Hiura, those guys, they were going to school so they were lucky. They went to St. Louis. As long as you're out of that California, Washington area, it's all right. But you got to have a job or something to go out there. So for me, I just graduated. I didn't have any ties, so might as well go into camp.

MK: When you were sent to the Sacramento assembly center, what was that assembly center like?

SK: The assembly center was just a kind of a building, and just the walls in between. But there's no—I won't say privacy, but they're all makeshift. They had a cafeteria, too. We ate at that cafeteria, but it was all under government control. You were under their control, so you had no choice. There's certain things, regulations, you have to follow. So, fortunately, I stayed with the Ryugo family. So I came under the Ryugo family. My brother-in-law, the oldest one, kind of made all the arrangements for the papers and everything.

MK: What were you allowed to bring to the assembly center?

SK: Your own clothing, that's about all. Actually, you couldn't bring anything really because they didn't allow no radio, or guns, or anything. Everything all confiscated. So I stayed with the family, and then I think, I'm not too sure, maybe only two weeks or so like that, then we went to Tule Lake. Then when I went to Tule Lake, since I was going to be in the medical group, we were able to stay—the hospital was just ready to be built yet, so we stayed in the barracks closest to the hospital. Minnie's folks were further inside, so when we moved over, I stayed with a couple of medical students and there were a couple of other Hawai'i boys.

MK: Who were the Hawai'i boys?

SK: One guy's name is Ogawa. One was Kikuchi, too. Kikuchi, but he's from Hilo. And Ogawa was from Hilo, too, I think. But I lost track of where they went to. Kikuchi was in Chicago. I know he said his father used to be a minister in Hilo, Hongwanji minister or something, Kikuchi. And Ogawa, I don't know whether he had a brother or something, but he was the other fellow. And then there was a dental technician, Hamai. Hamai stayed with us and I'm glad he stayed with us because he was like a carpenter. He built a table

for us. We only had that kind of a bed, used to be the bunk bed like, canvas kind. So he made a bed for us, so then we put the mattress on there. We were pretty comfortable. He was good at it. We got all the lumber from the—they were building the hospital, see. So (chuckles) nighttime we all go there and grab the lumber. One by one, brought them in, put it under the (barracks). With all the lumber, he made a table for us and a bed. In fact, he made a kind of shelter (at the doorway). The building was just flat like this and there's no protection against the rain or wind, so he made a kind of a shelter outside so that protected us from the rain. But we got all the lumber from (the hospital building site).

WN: So Tule Lake you were staying in barracks and then Minnie's family had their own?

SK: Barracks, too. Everybody had, you know, like the army, they all had different barracks around. So they were in barracks 702 or something like that and we were 101, something like that. (About every ten barracks) had cafeteria, too, different area. All the barracks had different area. See, like us, we're right by the medical building, so we ate at the hospital. We were lucky.

MK: So you had different eating areas, like 702 went to a certain cafeteria, your group ate at the hospital.

SK: Yes. Our group was near the medical building, so we were lucky we ate at the hospital when it came up.

WN: How was the food?

SK: The food was plain food, I think. It was nothing fancy, I cannot recall really. Like spaghetti or whatever, there's nothing fancy.

MK: And then you know that Mr. Hamai who built all those things in your barracks, how did he get access to like a saw and a hammer?

SK: The saw and everything? I don't know where he got it, but he was able to [work with] just a handsaw, nothing electrical. I guess at that time, too, they had different shops around. But I know we didn't have any kind of tools at all. Right in the center room there they had a (wood stove), more or less, as a heater. None of that air conditioning, none of that stuff. It was just a (stove) in there. They provided the coal, I guess. I cannot recall too much. Most of us, we stayed at the hospital because that was more comfortable there, in pharmacy.

MK: What did you think of the conditions, the barracks, the furnace?

SK: Well, it's wartime conditions, so there's nothing you can do. They only provided the bed and the bunk, and then cafeteria (for each block). (The latrine was in the assembly center. It was country style: only holes arranged side-to-side and back-to-back.) Of course, being young, it didn't bother me too much. We got paid \$19 a month working, and the average people got paid \$16 a month (plus an allowance of \$4.50). Like Minnie, my [future] wife, worked in the cafeteria, so she got \$16 a month. That's all they give you because [you had] room and board. Like Kikuchi, he didn't work at all, he just stayed home, stayed in the back all day waiting for us because he had chess set and a *shōgi* set. That's how we learned to play *shōgi*. He's always waiting for us to get through work (laughs) and [he has the pieces] all lined up and ready to go play. And then cards like that. In that sense, we're all bachelors, so we all stayed together. He figured, "Why should I go to work?" He didn't have to work.

WN: You worked in the hospital?

SK: I worked in the hospital. Hamai, dental technician, he worked in the hospital, too. Ogawa, I think he worked outside. I don't know what kind of job they had, cleaning, but he got paid sixteen dollars. But Kikuchi said, "Why should I work?" (Chuckles)

WN: Besides work, what did you folks do every day?

SK: They had activities, they had baseball. They had a Hawaiian band, guys that knew music. You don't have to work if you don't want—I mean, so lot of those Hawaiian boys, they didn't work, they didn't do anything. They just milled around, played cards. But I worked in the hospital. It was nice. It wasn't air-conditioned, but it was well built.

MK: What was your work at the hospital?

SK: I worked in the pharmacy. We had, like any other hospital, all the drugs like that, and we used to pick them. Everything was free though, you know. Dispensed to everybody. Even the dental and medical work was free, too. Like a hospital facility, all free.

MK: In terms of supplies and equipment, was that hospital equipped well?

SK: Yes, they were equipped pretty good. Just like wartime, like an army hospital, they were equipped pretty good. Good dental chair. In fact, like some of the dentists, they were only getting paid nineteen dollars a month, so they work, but nothing. . . . They had to kill time, too.

MK: Who were the doctors there?

SK: There were some from Sacramento area. Even some Sacramento doctors, some went to some other places, too, though. Some went outside of camp. They went out to Chicago or someplace else.

WN: These doctors were Japanese?

SK: Yes, Japanese. So a lot of guys that had professions moved out, Chicago, some other area.

MK: And those days, what kinds of physical problems did you folks have to deal with at the hospital?

SK: It was just like any other hospital, we report to work in the pharmacy and take care whatever prescription that comes in. But then, it was kind of a, as I say, in the hospital, we start talking with all the dentists and everybody else. It was a kind of open thing, so that we knew all the. . . . Even the nurses, they had their shift, too. But as I say, I was single, so I was mostly with the boys. I worked in the pharmacy, and then stay with the boys.

And of course, we got married in camp. We had the Hawaiian boys' group, the Hawaiian boys, they played music for us. Of course, we had the reception in the cafeteria. There was a little church that we got married in. And the reception in the cafeteria. I think Minnie's folks paid for the food, whatever it was. Either that or else we used the food from cafeteria, the food that was over there. So it wasn't nothing special, it was just the regular.

WN: How did you folks decide to get married?

SK: Well, because once they said if you get a job outside. I said, "Let's get married. If we do, we go out together." So that's how. We got married to plan to move out; otherwise, you don't know how long you're going to be in camp at that time because some stayed for quite a while in camp until they closed it up. Later on, the Tule Lake, all the—I wouldn't say the bad element, but those that were against United States—a lot of guys from Japan were against United States—they rounded them all and they all stayed in Tule Lake after we all left there. But as you hear from experiences from all the relocations, they come from Wyoming, Arkansas, all different areas that they stayed in camps. Even some Hawai'i people got relocated, but nobody that I know from Hawai'i was in Tule Lake. They all went to Arkansas or Wyoming, some other places.

MK: Before the people who were more resistant against U.S. policy towards the Japanese Americans, before those people got in, what kinds of talk did you hear at Tule Lake before you left? What was the mood?

SK: We were Japanese Americans, but we still loyal to the United States, so we didn't associate with those. They're in different barracks. We didn't associate with them because we didn't want to get involved with them. I know, later on, before you could leave the camp, they sent a questionnaire out to everybody, for all of us. I remember it specifically says, "Are you loyal to the United States?" I put "yes" and it says, "Would you serve in the armed forces?" I put, "no." Because I figure at that time, why should I serve in the armed forces when they threw us into camps? So that point, I put, "no" on it.

But then later on when we went out to St. Louis, that's when the 442nd going to camp down Mississippi. They all came up. They said, "Don't volunteer." The first thing they said, "Don't volunteer anything." Because first thing when I went to St. Louis, I figure, well, I'll go see if I can go volunteer for the National Guard or Coast Guard around there. They said no. They don't take any Japanese American at that time. They wouldn't take us. But later on, when we came out, that's when I got my 1-A notice, too. They told me to report to Jefferson Barracks for induction.

So I went over there, they says, "No, you under twenty-five, so you report to the main headquarters in St. Louis." So I went over there, they said, "Your papers are not here." He said, "You better write to your draft board in Hawai'i and tell them to send the papers over."

So I told Minnie, "They want me do this." So I waited about a week, then I get a three-cent stamp (chuckles)—no airmail—and send it off. About a month or so later, eventually, I was able to get a passage back to Hawai'i. At that time, the draft board send the paper to St. Louis, report to Jefferson Barracks.

My wife said, "Oh, he's on his way to Hawai'i already. So better send these papers back to Hawai'i."

(Laughter)

And that's all. When I came back, to make a long story short, I got back [to Hawai'i] and worked for Benson Smith [& Co.] and the president of Benson Smith knew the colonel in charge of the draft notices. So whenever my number came up, he called up the colonel and says, "Get him deferred."

So I was deferred for about three times, and finally he said, "Gee, I don't think I can get you deferred anymore." And then the war ended, so I was lucky. He said he needed a pharmacist, so he got it deferred. On top of that he must've given them a bottle of liquor or something to keep . . .

(Laughter)

. . . in good grace with the colonel. But that's how I got deferred. Otherwise, I was 1-A and my number came up in the draft board.

MK: Going back a little bit, you mentioned that you and Minnie decided to get married so that you could go out of the camp.

SK: Yes.

MK: What did your family think about that idea?

SK: Well, because that was [arranged] before, while I was going to school, see. I knew the Ryugo family already. So, of course, they [SK's parents] had no choice, too, because wartime situation, they don't know what the situation going [to be]. So they said, "Well, you going get married, you go ahead and get married." So, they gave a blessing. And then after we got married, [in order] to get out [of the interment camp], that's when we wrote to all the different (boys and had an offer). We took a chance and went out to St. Louis.

Because those in the pharmacy, they said, "Oh yeah, but if you go out there to St. Louis, they're not going to pass you, then you're not going to have any job, what are you going to do? You might as well stay in camp. You don't have to worry about it."

But I said, "Oh, I'm going to go out there anyway." So when I went to St. Louis I worked at the Barnes Hospital and then I took the St. Louis board exam.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 37-6-3-01; SIDE ONE

MK: You were just talking about taking the St. Louis board exam.

SK: Yes, that's right. Well, when I took the board exam I passed so then I wrote back to other pharmacists, "Hey, come to St. Louis. There's not going to be any prejudice against you." So Mochizuki, he applied to Saint Mary's Hospital in St. Louis and he got a job there. So he came out. This other fellow went to St. Louis Hospital and he got a job there. So I told them, "Come on up" first. So they came up after that. But I was worried, if I don't pass, I'm going to look for some other kind of a job, anyway. But fortunately they didn't have any prejudice.

But St. Louis was one of the few areas. There's Washington University. Later on, some Hawai'i students came to Washington University Medical School. In fact, Dr. Ishii, Albert Ishii, and Dr. Ed Emura, they all were accepted at Washington University, because at that time there was no medical school at University of Hawai'i. Washington University was one of the few that accepted Japanese Americans. I remember, of course, like Cal [Berkeley] you cannot even get in, because wartime, [Japanese were] already evacuated.

MK: Besides worrying about that exam, did you and Minnie have any other worries or fears about coming out of the camp and going all the way to St. Louis?

SK: No. At that time, too, war period, they had that food stamp [program], too. We had twenty-five dollars, so we figured—in fact, we exchanged some food stamps. This apartment where we stayed at, we gave them extra of our food stamps, so that they reduced the rent a little bit, too. Because they were restricted on how much food stamps you could get at that time. And then Minnie worked at the trucking company while I was working in the hospital, too. We tried to make ends [meet] barely. But I remember at Barnes I used to get \$125 a month, and then we had to pay the rent weekly. By the time the fifth week came in, we were kind of short of cash already. You only get paid [every] four weeks, but the fifth week comes in, we don't get paid, so we get short. After I passed the board, I told Dr. Bradley—he was head of the Barnes Hospital, administrator. He said, “Well, stick around because when you go back to Hawai'i I get you a job at Queen's Hospital.” He tells me that, but at \$125 a month, I cannot make a living because I'm paying weekly rent.

So then, the lady in charge at Barnes Hospital, Mrs. Mueller, her husband was the head of Hesselburg Prescription Pharmacies. He was the head, so she told me, “I'll get you a job at Hesselburg.” So that's how I got a job at Hesselburg, and Hesselburg paid weekly. Not too much more, but I got paid weekly, so I was able to [manage]. But then, that time you work [twelve] hours a day. That would be 8 [AM] to 8 [PM]. So, when I worked on the late shift, I would get off at midnight; I'm worried. I make sure I can catch the last streetcar back to home. In the wintertime, it was cold. But I had to stay in the center [of the stop] to make sure. So, gee, I was cold, but I stay in the center, make sure that I don't miss the streetcar when it comes around. That was a tough time, though. At that time St. Louis, Missouri, pay on pharmacy was low, too. Just a little better than the hospital because you get paid weekly instead of monthly.

WN: Before we get too much into St. Louis, I just had a couple more questions about Tule Lake. When you got married, what did you folks wear?

SK: In fact, I could've had a suit maybe. So I just had the suit, and I think Minnie had a gown from her older sister, I think. She wore the gown, but it was just the family together. And of course, we had a few of the Hawaiian boys around, so we invited them because they played the Hawaiian instruments. The guy had the steel guitar, so he was good. Dr. Watanabe, he's a radiologist. Tetsui. He was in camp, too, so he danced the hula for us. As entertainment.

(Laughter)

WN: Was he good?

SK: Yes, he was pretty good.

(Laughter)

He married to [Alice Oka]. She was a nurse in the hospital and Watanabe was a physician there. I still remember, for entertainment he danced the hula with the Hawaiian music. When he came back [after the war], in Medical Arts Building, he had his office there.

WN: I remember you said there was baseball in the camps.

SK: Yes.

WN: Besides that, what else were there? Were there like movies?

SK: No. I don't think there were any movies. There were no movies. It was just this make-up band that played dance music over the weekend or something. But aside from baseball, I don't think they had any. No football, no uniform—I mean, they cannot get any gear, so baseball was the only sport that they played. At that time there was no basketball, no volleyball, because there was no court. It was just an open area.

WN: Were there like stores that you could buy things?

SK: Yes. I cannot recall too much. Some people, like my brother-in-law, he worked outside of the camp, but he came back into the camp and he'd be able to pick up a few things. Most of the stuff, not that I recall, there was no retail store around. It was strictly everything was provided by the camp.

MK: So the nineteen dollars that you earned, the sixteen dollars that Minnie earned. . . .

SK: We saved it.

(Laughter)

SK: That's how, you cannot buy anything, so you saved it.

WN: Could you leave the camp?

SK: You could leave the camp if you had (contract) work out in the field or something, but you got to come back into camp.

WN: Was there any kind of town out there in Tule Lake?

SK: No, most of them had to go to Idaho.

WN: How far were you from Idaho? Pretty close?

SK: Oh, they were quite a while away, but that was the only place they could get a job. That's why, my brother-in-law went to work in Idaho and came back. But most of them, as I say, either work in the camp area, cleaning up or whatever they do. That's about all. Because Minnie's parents like that, they didn't do anything.

MK: I'm curious, you hear stories about camp guards. You know, the guards at the camp. . . .

SK: Oh yes, they're on a post, way up there.

But a lot of Japanese people they get old wood, they make sculptures and make all kinds of nice things in camp. A lot of Japanese, they are good carpenters with their hands, but they cannot do anything, so that's all they did was make things.

MK: Sculpture.

SK: Yes. Something out of. . . . Of course, we were in Tule Lake, so way up north. But Arkansas down south, I don't know what happened.

WN: Did you folks come into contact with any of the guards at all?

SK: No. They were stationed up there, but we never bother them because all you do is live day by day. You don't know what's going to happen. But then, the only thing is once the 100th and 442nd came, then they would allow you to leave camp if you have a job. So that's when we really wrote all kinds of letters (of application).

MK: And you know when you got the job at Barnes Hospital, I'm just curious, in those days what was the job of the pharmacist?

SK: At Barnes Hospital, they got over 1,000 beds, so it's a big hospital, about three times the size of Queen's Hospital. But they supplied all the liquids. There was Children's Hospital, and there was couple of other hospitals right around with Barnes, they used to supply all the liquid. When I first started, they put me in the manufacturing side, so I used to make all the liquid and I used to make alcohol, all kind, in quantities for the hospital. Later on, I was able to get on the ground floor to start dispensing drugs. That's when I was hired first just to help make all kinds of ointment and paste. In the old days, lot of ointment, you got to mix them all up. Different kind of ointment for healing and burns and all, and I had to make those things. We used to make it and we supply the different hospitals, too. I know alcohol, boy, they get big drum of alcohol. Only pure alcohol. At that time, too, just like Prohibition, you cannot sell liquor and all kinds of stuff. But, gee, all the alcohol.

I was under the supervision of the head pharmacist, manufacturing, downstairs. He was an old man. But this other fellow in charge, boy he was a—you know St. Louis Cardinals baseball team? At that time St. Louis Cardinals had a good team, they won a couple of World Series. But anyway, he was a quick-tempered guy. Boy, when St. Louis loses, oh boy, he gets mad. Small, wiry guy, you know. He used to be in charge. He's the one that supervised us and told us what we got to make.

But then, later on, as I said, I only get paid \$125 a month. That's why I was downstairs, too, because I didn't have my license either until [I] pass the board to be licensed to practice. As soon as I passed it, then I told Mrs. Mueller, "I don't get enough pay over here."

So she said, "I try to get you a job at the prescription pharmacy."

That was really good though. That's the days, we used to fill over 700 prescriptions a day. The average, like Longs right here, they fill about 250 prescriptions a day.

MK: That's at Hesselburg?

SK: Hesselburg, because we used to supply all over St. Louis—north, south, east, west, you know. The delivery. We had about twelve pharmacists in that Hesselburg. They used to have all the direct lines to the doctors. All the doctors pick up the phone and he gets Hesselburg Prescription Pharmacy. I never did pick up the phone because I wasn't familiar with all the streets and names. So I just helped dispense, but I never take any of the orders from the doctor's office because I didn't know the street names and everything.

MK: In St. Louis, how were you treated? You're Japanese American, the war just about *pau*, but how did people react to you?

SK: You see, Mueller, he's a German. Japan, Germany, and Italy was kind of the allies on their own side. So although he's an American citizen and everything, but I guess he's a German so I think he had a kind of a soft spot for Japanese Americans, I guess. So he treated me real well. Mrs. Mueller, too. That's why I felt comfortable working over there, but work from 7 [AM] to 7 [PM], that's [including] the hour where we went lunch. And then, we used to work beyond that. In the wintertime, we used to work twelve, fourteen hours a day, but no overtime pay, straight pay. But those are the days, you get a job, you're a Japanese, you're happy to get a job. But they treated me well at Hesselburg; Hesselburg is a Jewish guy, I think, the head is Jewish. In fact, there's a book, I don't have it here. The old book, they showed a picture of Hesselburg Pharmacy as one of the leading prescription pharmacies in the United States. Showed all the things. But, Hesselburg was well known in St. Louis.

MK: How did you and Minnie like living in St. Louis?

SK: We had no choice. But, as I say, the people in St. Louis because being Midwest, too, there weren't too many prejudiced against the Japanese American. We're far away from California, so they didn't bother. My mother-in-law, later on, moved in with us after we got established in St. Louis. They moved out of camp, too, came to St. Louis. One day we took a taxi going into town. The cab driver tells me, "Your mother looks like Madame Chiang Kai-shek."

(Laughter)

I still remember that, he thinks we're Chinese. St. Louis was right near the border, but one of the things that amazed us is the prejudice between the White and the Black was big difference. When I applied for a job at Barnes Hospital, the application [check box] say, they only had "White" and "Black," no more Oriental or anything, so I put White. I never put Black.

And then we got on the bus, like the old days we like to sit in the back. He [bus driver] said, "No, in the front. Only the Blacks sit in the back." I remember, sometimes when the bus is kind of full, there's a Black that's waiting to catch the bus, the bus driver he doesn't care, he just passed the Blacks. St. Louis was right in the middle, but still had a difference between the Blacks and the Whites. That's one thing I experienced. But they didn't treat the Japanese bad. We were able to go wherever we want to.

There's one Dr. Tsuchiya, he was a professor at Washington University. And [Yasuyuki] Fukushima, that's Yasu[taka's] brother. He was at Washington University, Barnes Hospital, when I was there. And Dr. [Richard] Sakimoto, he was at Barnes Hospital, too. He got his training there. So when I came back to Hawai'i, I told Sakimoto that I worked at Barnes Hospital. He says, "I let you open a pharmacy in the Medical Arts Building." When they (built the building), he told me to go open up a pharmacy in there. All these doctors there, a lot of them are Washington University graduates. Yeah, [another] reason why [I knew Dr.] Sakimoto, too, is my wife was expecting in St. Louis. So the obstetrician said, "When you go to Hawai'i, you go see Dr. Sakimoto." That's how we got to know Dr. Sakimoto.

WN: Where did you folks live in St. Louis?

SK: We lived in an apartment run by a lady, first, and she rented us a room upstairs, actually a room. And then we had the kitchen and everything. Then later on, my sister-in-law came

out of camp. Then they came to St. Louis, too, and they bought a home in St. Louis. So then we moved in over there with them. Then they brought Minnie's parents to St. Louis, too. So, they stayed in St. Louis because we were the first ones there, so they came to St. Louis after that.

MK: How long did the Ryugos continue their lives in St. Louis?

SK: St. Louis? Oh, I think until after the war ended and they allowed the Japanese Americans to come back to California. They stayed there about three years, I think. Two or three years. Because that's the time I remember the 442nd, my brother folks came up on furlough. They were on their way to Chicago, so we treat him to Japanese food. *Tsukemono*, they miss that thing.

MK: And so your brother joined the 442nd?

SK: Yes. By that time, that's why we're in St. Louis then the 442nd formed and they went to Mississippi. And from Mississippi they came up. And of course, I knew a couple guys from up north, the MIS [Military Intelligence Service] group. They came down, too, because I kept in contact with some of them, so they knew I was in St. Louis.

WN: How were the winters over there?

SK: Oh, boy, that was cold. Gosh. It was cold in the winter, and hot in the summer. Gee, in the winter it's about ten degrees like that. I never had earmuffs before. I had to put earmuffs on and a scarf because your ears going to come off. Summertime was so hot, 100 degrees, at midnight it's still 100 degrees. Boy, it was hot. That's why everybody stayed outside, outdoors, but was hot.

But, fortunately, right about 1945, they start banning the coal. You cannot burn the black coal anymore. Black coal in the furnace, the black smoke come all out. Used to be everything black. Then the St. Louis ordinance passed, you could burn coal, but not the black one. I don't know what it was, but that's why the buildings got kind of clean now. But it used to be all black. You remember the old days, the kerosene, the kind of black ones, just like that.

MK: For a Hawai'i boy, it's a real big switch, yeah?

SK: Yes, was cold. Especially when I worked late until about ten o'clock like that because the last streetcar [came] maybe eleven or twelve o'clock, I forgot what it was. But I'm going to make sure I don't miss the streetcar. It was cold and windy, too. When the wind blows, it's really cold. That's why when I first went to St. Louis, I wondered how people could live in St. Louis when it's so hot in the summer and so cold in the winter. But I guess you got to make a living, so that's why. It's different from Chicago side. Because St. Louis is a wet cold—it's a kind of a humid cold. If it's a dry cold, it's not so bad. But when it's a humid cold, boy, it's really cold—a different kind of cold.

WN: Shall we end here?

MK: Yeah, I think so, and then we'll get you back to Hawai'i on the next interview. And hopefully our tape recorder will be working better. We'll bring another one.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape Nos. 37-7-4-01 and 37-8-4-01

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sidney Kosasa (SK)

Honolulu, Hawai'i

September 28, 2001

BY: Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

MK: So, the last time we were here, we still had you back in St. Louis.

SK: Yes.

MK: And you were telling us about how St. Louis was so different from other places you've lived, and you were telling us a story about the lightning and the weather in St. Louis, if you can share that with us again.

SK: Well, St. Louis, the weather is completely different from the West Coast or Hawai'i because of the fact that the weather has such extreme changes. Summertime it goes up to 100 degrees. Even midnight, it's 100 degrees, and wintertime, it goes down to about 30 degrees or 20 degrees, so extreme difference. So it made a tremendous impact on our living. I was just wondering how people could live in St. Louis with such bad weather. At that time, the ordinance [stated] that you cannot burn coal. They made [a new] coal that doesn't [emit] smoke. Because before then, all the buildings were all black because the smoke came out from the chimney. Every home, everybody, blowing through the whole [neighborhood]—everything was kind of black. But then they passed the ordinance, so at least the air would start getting clean. But it was kind of a smog, and all that kind of thing. It was not a good condition.

But I enjoyed St. Louis because the people were nice at that time. We didn't have any kind of discrimination. As I told you, when I applied for a job at Barnes Hospital, applications say either you were White or Black. They didn't have any Asian, so naturally, I put "White" on it, myself.

Aside from that, I had to take the state board [pharmacy exam] in St. Louis, and when I passed it, then I got a job at Hesselburg Prescription Pharmacy. Because up until then, I worked at Barnes Hospital, we were paid \$125 a month. But whenever the fifth week came out, I was always short on money because we had to pay weekly rent. So when the fifth week came out, we really had a hard time at that period. I remember that was war period, too. We had the food stamps so we were exchanging the food stamps with the landlord. So at least if we get the fifth week rent, we get a reduced rent on that fifth week.

But when I worked at Hesselburg at that time, we had to work ten hours a day. But wintertime, when a lot of colds and everything, we had to work overtime. Straight time now, no time-and-a-half. Just straight time, so from eight o' clock, we're supposed to quit about seven, but worked until ten o' clock at night. So that was a long shift. And I was

more concerned about going home because the bus, streetcar, was up to eleven o' clock at night and I want to make sure that I catch the last streetcar before going home. But it was an experience because I remember, even the streetcar you're on [is cold]. The track in the center [of the street], so naturally I had to go in by the center and wait for the streetcar, and boy, it was cold. Cold and dark. But I had to stand, make sure, so that at least when the streetcar comes, they'll stop for me. That was an experience.

But then, as I say, when I was working for Barnes Hospital, I used to walk home and that's when I first felt the thunder and lightning, it was something. Here [Hawai'i], the lightning is out in the ocean. It doesn't seem to—just you hear the rumbling of the thunder. But in St. Louis, boy, the thunder is loud and when the lightning [strikes], it just kind of cracks. It comes right down. Boy, it's sure scary. The sound is kind of a cracking sound. It scares you. That's why lot of children get scared of lightning and thunder. Well, you don't blame them because the Midwest area, it's huge. It's not like Hawai'i. So that was one of the experiences there.

Of course, as I mentioned earlier, I used to work with—walk home with a Japanese professor, Dr. Tsuchiya. He was a professor at Washington University. So those that went to Washington University knows this Dr. Tsuchiya because he was one of the early ones. Pre-war days, he was in Washington. At that time, too, not too many Japanese around the Midwest, so he was one of the few there. I got to know him pretty good. So we used to walk home together.

Then from there, after I passed the board, then that Mrs. Mueller, she was in charge of the pharmacy at Barnes Hospital. Her husband was the manager at that Hesselburg Prescription Pharmacy, so she said, "I'll get you a job at Hesselburg because then they pay you weekly." Almost the same amount of money, but I get paid weekly.

I had a good experience at Hesselburg because we had about sixteen pharmacists at that time and we used to fill over 700 prescriptions a day. We had about fifty direct lines to the doctors. The doctor always calls up and he gets directed to Hesselburg Prescription Pharmacy. It's a direct line.

In those days, pharmacy [work] was really compounding, we were mixing all the medications, we were making capsules, and suppositories. We were really making it. Now, everything is manufactured, so all you do is take from one package to another. Those were the days we really had to—we get the prescription, and all the ingredients are listed down to make sure you fill everything correctly, in the liquid. Once you fill the prescription, then, Mr. Mueller is the headman, then he double-checks the prescription with the medication and he'll yell out all the ingredients in the prescription so that you make sure. It's a surprising thing, but it makes you sure. If you miss one, they're going to say, "Hold it," and you call the prescription back because sometimes when you fill so many prescriptions, sometimes you overlook filling one prescription. You think you filled it. But I learned a lot. You put all the medication on the right side, and once you fill it, you put the ingredients on the left side so that you know you always filled it. Because the old days, there's about four different kinds of ingredients you had to fill up to put in the medication. Like [cough] syrup, like that. So it was really compounding. It was interesting but, as I say, it was long hours.

From there, naturally, I had a passage to come back to Hawai'i. But fortunately, as I told you earlier, I was classified as 1-A in St. Louis, Missouri. And yet, when I went to the draft board in St. Louis, they told me to report to Jefferson Barracks. That's like the place

you're going to enlist then. But my papers from Hawai'i were not here, so they say, "Your papers are not here, so you better write back to your draft board." Instead of they doing it, they asked me. So I waited a week or so and I put a three-cent stamp and then sent it back. About one month, little later, the draft paper came in, but fortunately in between the time, I was able to get a passage. So I was on my way to Hawai'i when my draft notice came up to my home in St. Louis. My wife told them, "Oh, he's already on his way to Hawai'i."

They say, "Well, we'll send these papers back to Hawai'i." (Chuckles)

WN: Would you say the majority of the prescriptions that you filled were pre-mixed? I mean, you actually had to actually combine them?

SK: Oh yes. Like you get aspirin, and then you get phenobarbital. All those, right now, it's all in tablet form. But lot of ours were in powder form. So we had to weigh it, we had to make sure that you got it right, and then we used to mix it in a mortar and pestle. We get the powder, then we used to put it in a capsule form. We used to punch all the capsules.

WN: You mean like the capsule where you have two sides and . . .

SK: Small one, yes. I used to get about two, three capsules. Before, used to be only one, one, one. But when you get used to it, you could take about three capsules at one time and you can do it all one time. And then it becomes a capsule. That's why, the old days, there were a lot of capsules. We get no tablets because tablets were all manufactured.

WN: Would the doctor tell you what percentage of what medicine goes in or you folks decide?

SK: No, no, no. It's all in the prescription. In those days. That's the old days. Modern doctors, they don't do that. They used to write "half a grain of phenobarbital or aspirin" or one grain so that you mix 'em all up. Then in syrups like that, we had to mix all the different liquids.

WN: Like codeine?

SK: Yeah. All those things. Even codeine, like that, we used to make them all. Even codeine, too, we used to put it into the syrup. We used to mix a lot of ointment, too. Ointments, and lotions, we used to. . . .

WN: But it was always the doctor that specified these things?

SK: Oh, yes. So then certain doctors, they have this thing, they call it "white lotion." That's the way we know what ingredients are already in this. So doctors write "white lotion" then we know the ingredients. A lot of the stuff we used to pre-mix, pre-mix some of those solutions, too. So that when the prescription comes in, we just put them in form. We used to do a lot of what they called "compounding," those days. We used to do lots of them. Even like cocoa butter. You had to make it into a suppository. To do that you gotta use the wax paper. Your hands are warm so you got to protect it so you don't melt the butter. As I say, I learned a lot more when I worked in the prescription pharmacy than when I was in pharmacy school. The pharmacy school, we learned the basic things. [We learned] lot of technique on how to do it better in the prescription pharmacy through experience. Even like the ointment, how smooth it is. When you put the ingredients in there, it's kind of rough. You really got to smooth out so the ointment, it gets smooth because the ingredients we put in there.

- WN: How did you smooth out the ointment?
- SK: Well, we had the spatula, like the kitchen [utensil]. And we had a, just like a kitchen. . . . What do you call that?
- WN: Cutting board?
- SK: Yeah, cutting board, but it was glass. They don't do it anymore, but we used to do that. Lots of them. That was hard work because you really had to smooth it so you could feel it on your hand if there's anything, little ingredients in there, it's not smooth. So it had to be really smooth.
- WN: What about like aspirin? Something basic like aspirin? Even that you had to mix?
- SK: Yes, there was aspirin. We used to make that aspirin. But aspirin becomes acetylsalicylic acid. So we used to combine salicylic acid and acetic powder. Whatever, I forgot, but we used to combine it together. Then you get to be acetylsalicylic acid, which is aspirin.
- WN: And that was in a capsule, too?
- SK: Yes, we used to make capsules, too. And then, those days, whether it's going to be three grain or five grain, we used to do a lot of weighing and those things. That's why we used to have about sixteen pharmacists, but it took time to fill the prescriptions.
- MK: So even with sixteen pharmacists, were you folks all generalists, that each of you can make any kind of medicine, or were you folks kind of specialized?
- SK: No, no, no. As the prescription comes in, if you get three, you go to fill the three. So they distribute all the prescriptions among everybody. But some of those things, when I first started over there, too, I was in the back side. We used to pre-mix a lot of the solutions. So that when we dispensed it, we already had it pre-made. But a lot of the ointment like that, you cannot pre-make. Pretty hard. So we had to make it fresh.
- MK: And then in those days, was it a pharmacist's job to write down the dosage and everything, too, when they dispense?
- SK: That's where we have the direct call. The doctor called in the prescription and we write down all the ingredients. I didn't get to the phone because I couldn't understand. You got to put the name of the patient and their address, I wasn't familiar with the address and things, so I didn't want to get to taking the phone there. Like over here, Hawai'i, of course, we know all the streets and everything. So no problem. Lately, of course, all the doctors call in the prescriptions, but it's already ready-made already, so no problem.
- WN: What about special? I'm sure there were like special orders. You know, like if someone was allergic to a certain ingredient, things like that.
- SK: Oh, yes. In the old days, too, we didn't have cortisone, and all the antibiotics came afterward. So we didn't have those. We had calamine lotion and all that kind of basic things. But now, with cortisone, anything, you could mix it up. We used to mix up some cortisone ointment like that, but now everything is all manufactured, so you don't mix it.
- MK: About when did pharmacy start getting manufactured drugs so that pharmacists don't have to compound things on site?

- SK: I think right after the war [World War II], they manufactured stuff, making most of the stuff.
- WN: So you were part of the transition part because you were right there after the war?
- SK: Yes, right in there. At that time, many of the manufacturers, all they were doing was supplying us the ingredients, the powders and things. We used to mix it up ourselves. But after the war, everything came in tablets and solutions, everything. Of course, now it's safer because when we were compounding, sometimes you could make human error, too. We had to be very, very careful, especially on those high-dosage [prescriptions] where you have to use only one grain or half a grain. Boy, you got to be very careful because otherwise you could kill a patient if you put five grains of something in there that they're going to take internally. So now, it's much safer because you take them to the pharmacy, at least already manufacturer-made so you don't worry. Otherwise, you make sure you go to a good pharmacist that knows all (chuckles). . . .
- WN: How long did people have to wait for their prescriptions to be filled?
- SK: At least, they had to wait about half an hour.
- WN: Not bad.
- SK: Yes. So most of the things, when we work in a prescription pharmacy, the doctor used to call for the prescription and we used to deliver it. We had about four delivery cars. East, west, north, and south. So that when the doctor calls in, we get all the prescriptions. The manager in charge says we going to fill all the east side prescriptions right now so that we fill them right away and then send them out. Then they say, next, you work on the west side, and then north and south. But if they come from will-call, first priority, we fill up because the patient is waiting for the prescription. But still then it takes about fifteen, twenty minutes. They had to wait because we had to mix it up. Mix it up and then we got to type the label and double-check it. Make sure you double-check all the ingredients before it goes downstairs. The pharmacy was upstairs and the drugstore was downstairs.
- MK: In those days, were you kind of rare as a Japanese American being a pharmacist in that time period?
- SK: Well, as I say, when I had the experience when I was going to school in San Francisco, as long as you're in the background, they don't know you. Even in the pharmacy, we're upstairs, so they don't know. No Orientals downstairs. So we never had that prejudice. We were upstairs, so we never did meet the customers or patients.
- WN: Generally, did you find people to be trusting of pharmacists in those days?
- SK: Oh yes. In fact, I was very close with the Walgreen people, they're the number one chain in the country, drug chain, [with] over 3,000 stores. But I remember, we were in the prescription pharmacy so we were, seems like, one step ahead of the drugstore pharmacists. We're strictly catering only to the doctors' prescriptions. That's all. Whereas Walgreen you would sell over the counter and everything else, and the pharmacy in the back. A lot of times, Walgreen, they were close by, they wanted some kind of a drug. What we do, we just charge them the real, full retail price. (Chuckles) So Walgreens got to buy it from us, but they had to pay the full retail price. I don't know whether they charged the patient much more extra or not. Those days, chains, drugstores like Walgreen, they didn't fill too many prescriptions because they only came to, like us,

a strictly prescription pharmacy. But I remember, a lot of drugstores, they don't have it. But we carried a complete line of all the prescriptions and everything. So out of courtesy we supplied them, but we charged them the full retail price.

MK: I was curious, at the time that you were working at the Hesselburg Pharmacy, what was Minnie doing?

SK: She was working in one of the trucking firms in St. Louis. I guess the regular office clerk. She was working there, but her job was a (night)-shift only. I think was twelve [PM] to nine [PM]. But ours was every day, from eight [AM] to seven [PM]. That was the regular shift. But we always worked overtime. During the wintertime we always worked overtime until nine, ten o' clock [PM]. But as they say, during those old days, whether you work overtime or not, no time-and-a-half, it's straight time. So she was working every day. So I always was home (first, except during wintertime).

MK: What kind of educational training did Minnie have?

SK: She didn't have too much training. Just like a file clerk, she does all the paper work. So she wasn't an accountant, just a file clerk. (She also did typing and general office work.)

MK: Was Minnie able to go to college like you, too?

SK: No, no. She was going to Sacramento, a junior college. But, like I say, she couldn't finish either because the war broke out.

WN: So she didn't continue after the war ended?

SK: No, because then we got married in camp.

MK: What kind of degree was she going for before she got married?

SK: I think she was going to liberal arts. She didn't have no specific profession or anything. Just the liberal arts.

MK: So when you folks went St. Louis, you folks depended on two incomes then? Yours' and Minnie's to make a go of it.

SK: Yes. At that time, the kind of valuable thing was the food stamps because you get to buy meat, only so much.

MK: And then those days, were you getting any help from back home in Hawai'i?

SK: No. We were strictly living on our own.

MK: And so, finally, you come back to Hawai'i. Tell us how you got that position at Benson Smith & Company.

SK: Well, [through] my mother and Mrs. Johnson [who] used to be in charge of the Maunalani [Nursing and Rehabilitation Center] up on the hill there. She was one of our tenants. We had a few homes around there and she lived in one of them, so she got to know Mrs. Johnson very well. She also knew Mr. [Michael] Levey. He was the president of Benson Smith [& Co., Ltd.]. So my mother, through Mrs. Johnson, asked to see how we can get passage for me to come back to Hawai'i. So I guess through Mrs. Johnson and

through Mr. Levey, they somehow knew the colonel or whomever in the military area, so that was how I was able to get a passage. Otherwise, there's no way I would have been able to come back to Hawai'i.

WN: That was arranged before you came back to Hawai'i?

SK: We didn't know how we could come back to Hawai'i, but I think one of the things required you had to have a job in Hawai'i. And that's how, I guess, through Mrs. Johnson I was able to get a job in Benson Smith. So I think I was able to come back to Hawai'i.

MK: Did you and Minnie ever just consider going back to California because she's from California?

SK: No, we were always kind of thinking of coming back to Hawai'i though. Because in California, she didn't really have anything. She, of course, had sisters and brothers there, but she didn't have no intention of—she just wanted to make sure where I go, she'll go.

WN: Did you have a hard time convincing her to come to Hawai'i? Or did you remember what her feelings of Hawai'i were?

SK: No, I know it was kind of lonely for her, though. Because all her sisters and brothers were in California and her parents were in California. So it was kind of hard for her at the start because she had nobody to talk to in Hawai'i. But she's a strong lady.

WN: Do you remember telling her about Hawai'i? Or even trying to describe what Hawai'i was like to her?

SK: No, not necessarily at that time. Wartime, so we didn't know what the condition is, whether I'm going to be coming back to Hawai'i or going to be in California. I was uncertain at that period. But I wanted to, naturally, because my parents were in Hawai'i, too. We had the grocery store, too. So we figure, try to get back to Hawai'i.

MK: And then during the war years, what happened to your family business?

SK: Her family business?

MK: I mean, your family business, the M. Kosasa Store.

SK: They still had the grocery store. I don't know what the condition of war was in Hawai'i at that time, but they were able to operate the store throughout the war. They didn't say they had any hardship or anything. Well, I guess Hawai'i was a little different from California because there were so many Japanese that they cannot evacuate the Japanese from Hawai'i so they had to do business with them.

MK: And then during the war years, what happened to your brother, Neil?

SK: He volunteered with the 442nd. Then he came back. Then he worked in the grocery store, but he took up finance at the University of California, then worked for Island Insurance because my parents and the Tokiokas were very close families. As I said, they were [originally] from the same prefecture. So he got a job at Island Insurance [Co., Ltd]. He stayed there until he passed away. In fact, he helped develop the Japanese Cultural Center in San Francisco. They have a . . .

- WN: Japan Town.
- SK: Japan Town, they had a Japanese Cultural Center over there. The Tokioka group developed that thing, too. But he was kind of in charge, too, so he lived there for a while to get all the permits from San Francisco, and get help from Japan to finance, to help.
- MK: So getting back to you, you came back, you got the position at Benson Smith and Company. The position was branch manager of the . . .
- SK: No, no. I got back as a pharmacist. So I worked in the Downtown Benson Smith as a pharmacist and I was just strictly filling prescriptions. Yet, at the same time, we're over-the-counter, so we're helping out in the storefront, too. But mostly filling prescriptions. Then later on, the manager at this Beretania store got ill so he had to take a leave of absence. So that's when they asked me to go over there and be the manager of this Benson Smith in Beretania Street. That's how I got to be the manager of that store. Because at that time, too, in the old days, you got to have a pharmacist to open the drugstore. You cannot open a drugstore without a pharmacist. I was a pharmacist/manager.
- WN: How was pharmacy work different? How would you compare pharmacy work at Benson Smith compared to St. Louis?
- SK: Completely different because in Hawai'i, all the doctors from the old days, from plantation days, they used to provide all the medications to the patients. You go to the doctor's office, and they give the medication. They never used to write prescriptions. Very few wrote prescriptions. Very, very few. The old-time Japanese, in the office, they had a full line of drugs in there.
- WN: On the shelf?
- SK: Yes. Because the doctor says, well, "This pays for the nurse's salary." Because they make money on the drugs. The old days, you go to the doctor's office, they give you the medication over there. So very few prescriptions were filled. So we were, more or less, over-the-counter selling proprietary drugs and cosmetics.
- WN: Were you still compounding in Benson Smith?
- SK: Very few. Very few compounding. The only compounding was maybe the ointments or lotions. Some dermatologists make a specialty. But aside from that, it was all already mostly—that's the reason why most of the old doctors, they all have their own drugs. They had all the drugs and syrup and everything. So what they had, they gave it to you.
- MK: Where did the doctors get their drugs?
- SK: Well, they buy it from McKesson[-Langley-Michaels]. McKesson was a wholesale drug company. So they would buy directly. Now, still yet, they do sell directly to the doctors, but very, very limited because now most of the younger doctors, they all write prescriptions. Now the drugs are so expensive that they cannot afford to stock their own drugs.
- WN: So McKesson would mix the drugs and sell it to . . .

- SK: Yes, McKesson had already manufactured drugs ready. They used to sell it. The syrup and tablets, everything. They used to sell it to the doctors. That's the reason why when we first came out, we tried to stop the doctors from dispensing drugs. We formed our association, and we start to put the pressure on McKesson to stop selling to the doctors. Of course, the doctors, as the drugs got more expensive, they don't want to carry because they give to the patient, the patient don't pay for them. They themselves going to get stuck with medication. And not only that. At that time, whatever medication he has, the doctor is going to give [the patient] because he's not going to buy new drugs or anything. He's just going to give whatever it is. So the old days was very limited. But now, modern time with all the different drugs, all [doctors are] writing different prescriptions. Of course, you get that third party now, the drug plans. So everybody's in the drug plan and you pay so much for the drugs.
- MK: Gee, even though you were trained as a pharmacist, your job as a pharmacist changed, yeah?
- SK: Changed.
- MK: Before, you were compounding, now you're working as . . .
- SK: Yes, completely changed. When I first came back, I wanted to open a prescription pharmacy just to cater to—but that's when I found out that all the doctors were buying all the drugs from McKesson. So they didn't write prescriptions at all. So very, very few prescriptions went out. Mostly was from the dermatologists that we had to mix them up or they write a prescription for the ointment like that. But those were the old-day doctors. The modern day, it's completely changed. Everything is writing prescriptions now.
- MK: So when you had the job as a pharmacist branch manager for Benson Smith Beretania, what were your duties then?
- SK: Mostly, we used to fill only about ten or fifteen prescriptions a day. So there was just a little bit. So in between, we used to be mostly over-the-counter, selling vitamins, and selling cough syrup. Those days, too, what's good for the headache. So we used to sell over-the-counter drugs like Bayer Aspirin, cough syrup, nose drops. That was the main drugs at that time. At that time, too, the drugstore was kind of small. It's not like Longs, nowadays, that carried everything. We used to be strictly a drugstore. We were just selling only over-the-counter proprietary drugs. That's what they used to call it.
- WN: When you were in St. Louis, there were proprietary drugs on the market . . .
- SK: Yeah, there were a few proprietary drugs. But most of them, the doctors called in for the prescription. In the old days, too, the doctors liked to mix up their own medications so that like headache, they put aspirin inside, then they put some other, phenobarbital, a few other items, too, besides, in the cough syrup. But right now, all kind of things completely have changed because you have the antihistamine, cortisone. So nowadays, a pharmacist is strictly, all they do is. . . . So their role is kind of changing, too. They getting to be consultants now because there's so many drugs that interact against each other: you take this, it's no good to take this other one because you get a reaction to it. So that's what the pharmacists nowadays do quite a bit of. But, still yet, they fill a lot of prescriptions because the doctors, have the third-party drug plan, they don't care. They just write one prescription after another because . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

SK: . . . so many prescriptions now. Even when we had the Thrifty Drugs Store, we used to fill maybe seventy-five or a hundred prescriptions a day. But, now, two [hundred], three hundred prescriptions a day, they fill. Whenever you go to the doctor, they always give you two, three prescriptions.

WN: You mentioned an association. What was the name of that association?

SK: National Association of Chain Drugstores. Then we had the Affiliated Drugstores. Affiliated Drugstores is a buying group. That's with all the houseware items, the toys. But no drugs at all. Affiliated Drugstores is strictly a buying group. Just like Longs right now. You want to buy a broom or houseware items, light bulbs, all kind of things that you see advertising in Longs. Sundry items, they call it. They used to buy, because we had a group of fifty drug chains with over 1500 drugstores, a chain. And naturally, if you want to buy like an Ever Ready battery or something, as an individual you pay a certain price. But as a chain, you get a big discount. So it's a buying group so we get a big discount, lot of buying from the manufacturer. That's how we're able to—same thing like Longs—able to sell it cheaper.

WN: But you said earlier that there was an association that tried to stop doctors from dispensing drugs.

MK: Was that the Hawai'i . . .

SK: Hawai'i Pharmaceutical Association.

WN: Okay. Hawai'i Pharmaceutical Association. And what did you have to do to get this done? To get doctors from . . .

SK: To make a long story short, when we first came back from the Mainland, we were a graduate of an accredited college of pharmacy. The old days, if you work in the drugstore, two years or so, you could go take the exam. The head of the exam was Mr. Levey, and Mr. Meyers, and Hollister Drugs. The three drugs[tores]. And when they need a pharmacist (chuckles), they go take the exam and they passed the guy in the drugstore, the worker, to become a pharmacist. So when we came back, we found out about that, so we got together and said, "Let's form one association." So Phillip Lam and Gerald Hashimoto from Seiseido Drugs, and a few of us, we got together, and said, "We're going to form this association." So that's how we formed the Hawai'i Pharmaceutical Association. We had Stewart's Pharmacy joining us, too. Then we went to the legislature and we tried to pass a bill to prevent McKesson from selling directly to the doctors. They had to go through a drugstore. We were able to kind of pass that. But still yet, legally, you cannot stop it, but with that, with all the drugstores getting together and putting the pressure on McKesson to stop selling to the doctors, that's how we slowly were able to stop the doctors from dispensing. But at the same time, because the drugs became more expensive, the doctor cannot afford to carry their own drugs.

WN: So they ended naturally, too?

SK: Yes.

WN: Was Mr. Levey of Benson Smith involved in this association as well?

SK: No, because he was on the board of pharmacy, too. So they controlled the---in other words, when you go to the state board (to take the exam), you got to be on the right side with Levey guys, otherwise they can flunk you. It was a kind of political thing. But slowly, as we got more powerful, we changed it. Then we asked the governor to appoint pharmacists to the board and not—like Levey was not a pharmacist.

WN: Who was your boss at Benson Smith?

SK: Mr. Levey, he was the boss.

WN: How did he feel about you getting involved in all of this?

SK: Well, I guess, indirectly, he had—pretty hard to control because already more and more pharmacists coming up so they cannot put too much pressure on the pharmacists. And he had the Parke-Davis Drug Company franchise, too. He represented Parke-Davis in Hawai'i. So slowly, they themselves kind of lost the power of running the board of pharmacy. They were running it. They controlled it up until we came out. At that time, there were not too many pharmacists so they controlled the board of pharmacy. But then when we came back, then slowly we started going after the governor and getting pharmacists on the board. So now, the board members are all pharmacists there.

WN: Sounds pretty gutsy on your part. (SK chuckles.) How did you get to know Mr. Lam?

SK: Well, he had a drugstore, too, on the corner of Nu'uanu and King Street. He had a Philip's Pharmacy there. So he was in the same situation with us, we wanted to stop the doctors from dispensing. And Gerald Hashimoto, he had the Seiseido Drugstore, too. Both were pharmacists, too. So that's how we got together.

MK: And in those days, how hard was it to pass the pharmacy board exam?

SK: When I took the thing, Levey, those folks, were still on the board. I was working for Benson Smith so naturally, he wants to make sure that. . . . (Laughter) So that's why how most of them, when they came back, they either had to work for Benson Smith or Hollister Drugs. There were very, very few independents. So we all passed the board. But Levey was pretty good. He was for the drugstore operation. He was pretty fair.

MK: What does the exam involve in those days?

SK: It's the same thing. They had kind of a list of chemistry and mostly names of the drug, different kinds of drugs. At that time, they didn't do too much analytical work. If you're a graduate from an accredited college of pharmacy, you know your pharmacy. Mostly they ask you names of the different drugs or how you identify the drugs like that. That's about all the exam was.

MK: It was a written exam?

SK: Yes, written exam. That's why guys working at a drugstore for three years, they could pass the exam because they know the names of the different kind of drugs. We didn't have any compounding or anything to do. When I went to California, we did

- compounding, too. They were much stricter. So even today, California is still not affiliated with the other states. Hawai'i, and the rest of the forty-eight states, you have the reciprocity so that you take the exam, I think it was just a small amount of material that you gotta read to be able to be affiliated because you're already a pharmacist. But California, even if you have a license in Hawai'i, you still got to go take [the exam]. But like me, it makes no difference because I'm not going to practice in California. Of course, all my friends were in California, naturally, they're all pharmacists because they all were classmates of mine. They all live in California.
- MK: When you were the pharmacist branch manager for Benson Smith & Co., you were dealing more with over-the-counter drugs. So were you kind of consulting and selling then?
- SK: Yes, that's why there was a little friction between the doctors and the pharmacists because you're not supposed to be prescribing drugs to the patients. We're the ones that know the patient. But when they ask for a good cough medicine, nose drops, any good nose drops, we used to recommend all those over-the-counter drugs. A lot of doctors, they don't like that. But we overcame that. That's the thing we had at the very start. The doctor says you're not supposed to be prescribing drugs. That's what we did a lot over there. Even right now, on the advertisement, it says consult your pharmacist for information. Right now, too, pharmacists, they got to know all the ingredients in a certain drug so that you don't have any [allergic] reaction. Taking one drug and you take another one, you get a reaction. That's where the pharmacist kind of watches that.
- WN: So Benson Smith, when you first started, can you try and remember, what did you folks sell? Was it exclusively medicines, drugs?
- SK: Mostly, yes. Benson Smith had the Rexall Drug. There used to be a Rexall Drug Company. All Rexall Drug used to carry their own products. It's like a private label. But it's all Rexall Drugs. They were competing against McKesson and everything, but they all had their own mouthwash, they all had the vitamins, they all had the cough syrup. Everything. Rexall Drug had their own. So, naturally, working for Benson Smith you pushed the Rexall Drug products.
- WN: Did they sell things like toothpaste?
- SK: Yes, they had toothpaste, too. They had quite a few lines. Just the Rexall Drug. But still yet, the popular ones were Crest and Colgate. But still yet, almost equivalent to that, Rexall Drugs can get cheaper. But people, they have the one-cent sale, they call it. You buy one, you get another one for one cent. That's the kind they—lots of Rexall Drug ones. They used to buy mouthwash like that. Similar to Listerine mouthwash.
- MK: And then you mentioned that in addition to prescription drugs, you folks also had cosmetics.
- SK: Yes.
- MK: So did you have to help customers with the cosmetics, too?
- SK: Not too much on the cosmetics because we used to have a cosmetician, more or less, that's in charge of the cosmetics department. It's a lady anyway, usually, so they recommended. In the old days, they had the pancake make-up and all kind stuff. Eyebrows. They did most of the recommendations. Although we did sell Chanel perfume,

and cologne, men's kind stuff. That's no problem. But when we come to the cosmetic stuff, we did have cosmetician that sells that.

MK: Since you were branch manager over there, how many people did you have to supervise?

SK: Well, we weren't too big. We had about eight people in a shift. You had a cosmetician and sales clerk/cashier, more or less.

WN: What about things like snacks? Candy, things like that?

SK: Yes, we carried quite a few of those things, too. Candy, snacks, potato chips, and we had liquor, too.

WN: Oh, you had liquor, too, way back then in Benson Smith?

SK: Yes.

MK: So sundry items, snacks, over-the-counter drugs . . .

SK: Liquor, cigarettes, and naturally, prescriptions.

WN: That was about it?

SK: Yes.

MK: How big was a Benson Smith store?

SK: It was about 2,000 or 3,000 square feet. It wasn't that big. It was a regular corner drugstore.

MK: And then in those days, that particular area that it was located, what kind of clientele would come to that branch?

SK: Mostly for drugs. We had the Piggly Wiggly Supermarket that sold the grocery stuff. And we used to be attached next to it so we used to sell all the drugs. A lot of over-the-counter drugs, and candies, magazines, too.

WN: This is Beretania and Ke'eaumoku Street?

SK: Yes.

WN: What corner was that?

SK: On the *makai* side, but right on the corner, even right today they have the Dairymen's [Meadow Gold]. Right there. And right next to that, there was this Piggly Wiggly Supermarket, in the same building but they were divided. Supermarket side was the bigger side and we were the smaller side next to it.

WN: So you folks were on the Koko Head side of Dairymen's?

SK: Yes, Koko Head side. And then later on Sears Roebuck [and Company] came up. That came up a bit later. But the same side.

- WN: So it was more on Beretania, it wasn't on the corner.
- SK: No, it wasn't right on the corner.
- MK: A couple stores down.
- SK: Yes.
- WN: I'm trying to think how come I don't remember that.
- SK: Then on the corner there, opposite side, Eddie Yamasaki had his gas station. I don't know, whether [Union] 76 or something.
- WN: Right across the street?
- SK: Yes.
- WN: The *mauka* side. Yeah, that's still there.
- SK: Still there, yes. That was there the time I was there, too. Eddie Yamasaki used to own that (service station).
- WN: And then the other corner was Palace Theatre? The *mauka*-*'Ewa* corner?
- SK: On the other side, then beyond there's a street that—there's some shops on the other side.
- WN: I thought it was maybe a movie theater over there.
- SK: No, movie theater was on King Street. Pawa'a Theatre.
- WN: Okay, that's Pawa'a, but there was a Palace Theatre?
- SK: Palace Theatre, yes. Palace Theatre was on the corner, too. I think it was on Ke'eumoku and Beretania corner. On the *mauka-makai* side corner.
- WN: *Mauka*-*'Ewa*.
- SK: *'Ewa* side, yes.
- MK: That later became Nippon Theatre? Same site?
- WN: Yeah. It later become Nippon.
- MK: I just have one more question about the Benson Smith time. When you were branch manager, you had to become a supervisor to people, you had to be administrator, too, yeah?
- SK: Yes.
- MK: How did you find this kind of work? It's different from being just the pharmacist. It's running a business.

SK: Yes, that's how I learned how to manage the drugstore. I didn't know how until I got to be a branch manager. Then they taught me all about the books, profit and loss statement. At that time, as a pharmacist, you don't worry about the profit and loss because you're just a department. But once you became the manager, you're in charge of the sales and profits. So you got a little bit more responsibility. Profit and loss, in charge of your people, and whatever welfare that you had to be aware of. But I had a good assistant. Eddie Kamida. He was a good assistant. He was a University of Hawai'i student. But he was working part time for me. So he was really good. I taught him a little about the drug store. I could always depend on him.

Later on, when he graduated, he worked for the state in the employment office. He was in charge of all of the executives that applied for and wanted a job. The ones that were kind of upper echelon. So fortunately, when Eddie was working there, this Max Massanari that later became operational manager, applied for a job because he had to come to Hawai'i because he had emphysema. So since he's not going to do anything, might as well go look for a job. So when he went to see Eddie, then Eddie call me up, "Hey, there's a good man that's looking for a job in a drugstore. So why don't you talk to him?" Ironically, that's the way I was able to get Max Massanari to work for us. He really helped us in our business, Max Massanari. He was a division manager at Thrifty Drugs, L.A., with over 500 stores. So he was in charge of eighty stores. So he was a well-qualified regional manager. Fortunate for us, too, he was in L.A. and he had emphysema, so the doctor says, "You stick around L.A. long enough, you're going to pass away." Max had a son at Pearl Harbor. So he went to visit his son at Pearl Harbor. For the first time he said he could sleep at night because of the weather. But eventually, he got over the (illness). Wife's from the Mainland, so they wanted to go back to the Mainland. But he stayed for about (twenty) years. He's of Italian-German descent. He's a wiry guy. He's a tough one. He was good. He really taught us the operation of a chain drugstore. He brought all kinds of new ideas and everything because he worked for Thrifty Drugs. He was division manager, so he was able to get all kinds of materials for us.

MK: And then while you were at Benson Smith, when you first started managing the drugstore, who taught you the ropes?

SK: As I say, I had to learn the hard way. Benson Smith kind of taught me. Mr. Leong was the comptroller at Benson Smith. So he kind of taught me about the p-and-l [profit-and-loss] and all that kind of stuff. I didn't know anything about the profit-and-loss statement. But he being an accountant, he taught us. Naturally, I grew up in a grocery store so I kind of knew how to work with people. That made it a little easy.

WN: Did you enjoy that new role, going from pharmacist to management?

SK: Yes, I enjoyed it because then it kind of gave me ideas: one of these days I'm going to open my own drugstore. At least I'll have all the experience. So that really helped me.

WN: I know, going back, your mother suggested that you go to pharmacy school a long time ago. Then you came and then you get educated. What was her influence at this time? It seems like . . .

SK: She's a pretty smart lady so she knew that Stewart's Pharmacy was making money. In the old days, even in Japan, they say if you're selling drugs, you make good profits. We were in a grocery store so the profit is small. And she knows, too, because we were selling drugs, too, in our Kosasa Store and the profit was there. "Drugstore, you're going make

more money. So why don't you go in the drugstore business?" So that's how I got started. But Kosasa Store, too, we were selling little drugs, over-the-counter drugs, too. So I liked retailing.

MK: And then after being the branch manager at Benson Smith & Co., you eventually owned Mid-Pacific Drug Co. in Hickam Village. How did that happen?

SK: As I say, Mr. [L.] Verble was in charge of the Beretania store. And he got sick. I don't know whether he had tuberculosis or something but he knew these owners of the Mid-Pacific Drug Co. Ackerman was one of the owners. So through some connection, he said, "The Mid-Pacific Drug Co. might be up for sale. Why don't you go check on it?" So that's how. And I knew Mr. [Edmund] Ehlke. He was the manager of Mid-Pacific Drugs Co. Before then, he was a drug salesman. But he was a pharmacist, too. So I asked Eddie, "Ed, how's this place?"

"Oh, this place is good because it's kind of captivated traffic. It's in Hickam Village."

That's where all the civilians and then the military living outside the Hickam Field used to live there. It was run by the military there. So it was like a concession in there. So finally, with financing, I was able to buy them out. That was another good experience because then I got to know all the different manufacturers and everybody else. When I worked for Benson Smith as a store manager, I was just the manager of the store so I didn't buy anything. Everything came up from the warehouse. But once I went out, then I got to buy from all the different vendors.

WN: So you were your own boss at Mid-Pacific.

SK: Yes.

WN: When you say you bought them out, you bought out, what, the actual . . .

SK: I bought out the company. I forgot how much I paid for them. Fifty thousand [dollars] or something like that. It was kind of high. Quite a bit of money at that time.

MK: How did you raise the money?

SK: No, I had my parents help me at that time. But I borrowed from the bank, too, so I was able to finance the thing. Being the military, right next to the Mid-Pacific was a supermarket, too. It was a supermarket and a drugstore combination there. This fellow, Pang, was the manager of the supermarket there. He knew the colonel in charge of this whole area, in charge of all the retail complex. So he introduced me to that guy so you got to be on the good side with him because, after all, you're in a military complex. He helped me a lot, getting to know the military people, too. That was a good operation there.

WN: Was it independently owned? Mid-Pacific?

SK: Yes, independently-owned. Ackerman and I can't think of the other guy that owned it. So I bought them out. They owned it, but they were never involved in it. Eddie Ehlke was the manager.

WN: Was that pretty much the only drugstore of that kind . . .

- SK: Yes, in Hickam Village. He was the only one. He had the exclusive. So then, of course, later on—I mean, further down, they had the other drugstore. We were in Hickam and they were in the other village. They were a little away. And Jack Wong—he just passed away—was the manager of that store. It was run by Stewart's Pharmacy at that time, too. But I forgot what they called it. It wasn't Hickam Village, but it was a military [area], too.
- MK: So your Mid-Pacific Drug Co., it was in Hickam Village which is military property, military-owned, and so your business, Mid-Pacific Drug Co., it's a leasehold business?
- SK: Yes, it was a concession. It was a lease concession with the military. All our clients mostly were civilians working for Hickam Field. So our customers were always from the military, people working in there. At that time, they [civilians] didn't have the PX [post exchange] privilege, so they had to buy from us.
- WN: Oh I see. Okay. So most of your customers were local Hawai'i people?
- SK: Yes, mostly *Haoles* that work for Hickam Field. Lot of civilians that work. Most of the civilians, too, I think they came from the Mainland.
- MK: Civilian military workers.
- SK: Yes, that's the reason why they had the villages there for the military civilians.
- MK: This Hickam Village, was this near or included the Civilian Housing Area Three?
- SK: It was kind of attached to Hickam Field. We were just outside the Hickam Field but still it was within the Hickam Field complex. So it was still under military control.
- WN: So the military personnel went to the PX for their drugs?
- SK: Yes, and a few would buy some drugs from us. But majority of them, [purchased at the PX] because naturally, the PX they get a better price.
- WN: So you were your own boss at Mid-Pacific. What kinds of things did you sell there? What did you sell besides drugs?
- SK: Same thing. A lot of proprietary drugs. The PX, they don't carry a lot of the drug items. So we used to carry quite a few of the drug items. And then mostly candies and snacks like that.
- MK: And how many workers did you have to take care of?
- SK: We didn't have too many at that time. We only had about, I think, three, three—six all together. Three in two shifts. All of these workers were *Haoles* at that time. A lot of civilians' wives worked in that area.
- WN: So you were going from a salaried position at Benson Smith to owning your own business and taking care of your own salary. How was that? Was that a big decision for you?
- SK: No, it was a kind of transition that I learned in running Benson Smith. I knew how to operate profit and loss and everything. So it wasn't too bad. We kept the books, but it was

strictly cash-and-carry anyway. So it wasn't too hard. Of course, being military we didn't have to pay any for the light and all that stuff. We didn't have to pay. It was all included. No need to worry about water or electricity. It was all paid for by the military.

WN: Was Minnie involved at all?

SK: No. Later on she got involved. Because we were living Kuli'ou'ou that time. Boy, it was a long, long drive. So she learned how to drive then.

WN: Plus you were having a family. Your family was . . .

MK: Was growing, yeah?

SK: Yes. That was growing, too. She learned how to drive.

WN: That's a long drive.

SK: Yes, it was a long drive, over an hour. Kuli'ou'ou, only two-lane highway.

WN: So you did that every day.

SK: Every day, yes. But we were young so it wasn't too bad. When you think about it, I wouldn't do it now. (Laughter)

But those days, you still young, so you're energetic.

MK: In those days, how welcome was someone like you, like a new competitor in the drug business on O'ahu. Was it hard for you to get drug vendors to sell you drugs to develop your own store?

SK: No. We had no problem with—of course there was the competition among different drugstores there. But I treated all the vendors well. Salesmen, I treated them nicely. They always, any time there's a favor, they gave it to me. That's why I always advise, you treat your vendors well because after all, they're just like partners in your business. You treat them well, they going to do you a favor in case, shortages like that, they're going to supply you and not the other stores. So that's one thing I learned. You work with your vendors.

And I helped some vendors get started, like Island Tobacco Company [Pacific Tobacco Inc.]. Harold Okimoto, I helped him so later on he helped me, too. And Hawaiian Host [Candies]. After I opened a [pharmacy at] Gem [Discount Department Stores] then I started selling Hawaiian Host candies. They just started in Kaimukī. Mr. [Mamoru Takitani]—unfortunately he passed away but I still remembered—I helped him a lot because he needed help to sell Hawaiian Host candy and just started. And we sold a lot for him in Gem.

MK: Back in the days when you had Mid-Pac Drug Co., how did it work? Sales reps. from the drug company would come to you and ask you to buy their goods? How would it work, the relationship between you, the retailer, and the wholesaler?

SK: The old days, well even now, they have salesmen. Like McKesson used to have salesmen and come take orders. So then we used to give them the orders. I didn't fill too many prescriptions, but later on in Kaimukī we had a lot of the, we call it detail man. In other

words, a manufacturer like [Eli] Lilly [and Company], Parke-Davis, [Johnson &] Johnson, they all used to come. Some used to take orders but most of them came to see, make sure we have all the product in stock in the stores. They helped us a lot. I treated them well, so even later on, at the home office, I go visit them and they treat me real well, especially at Parke-Davis. Of course, Parke-Davis merged with Warner-Lambert [Company] now.

MK: How long did you folks own Mid-Pac Drug Co.?

SK: Only about a year and a half. Just about a year and a half. Then I forgot who I sold it to. I sold it to somebody else. That's when I started Thrifty Kaimukī.

MK: That will be 1949 yeah? So in 1949, the family incorporated, right?

SK: Yes.

MK: They had Sidney, Minnie, Neil, and Mary.

SK: No, myself, Sidney, Neil, my brother, and my father, Morita. That's how we get MNS, Limited.

MK: The newspaper was incorrect then because the newspaper says Sidney, Minnie, Neil, and Mary.

SK: No, it's not Mary. Mary is Neil's wife. Minnie, naturally, with me. But it's three. It was my father, myself, and Neil that incorporated the MNS Limited. But now we changed to a holding company. So MNS is one of the subsidiary of NHC. NHC is a holding company. We just formed that about a year or so. MNS Limited is the operation of . . .

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 37-8-4-01; SIDE ONE

MK: . . . [Mo]rita Kosasa, Sidney Kosasa, and Neil Kosasa Incorporated.

SK: Yes. Mary is, wife of Neil. Minnie's my wife.

MK: So MNS Limited was started in 1949?

SK: [No, MNS started in 1967. M. Kosasa and Sons] owned the building [at 3610 Wai'alae Avenue], too. That building we have right now. The Payless [Shoe Source] is the tenant there. But (M. Kosasa and Sons) put up the building and then Kaimukī Pharmacy rented it.

MK: How did your family get that land to build?

SK: Well, the old days, there was a Mr. Hosaka. He passed away, but he's from Los Angeles. He owned this property where Thrifty Kaimukī is right now. He owned the property and in the old days he was a taxi driver. And Mr. Hosaka and our family were real close, good friends. So he offered to sell us that property on Wai'alae Avenue. Then later on he moved to the Mainland, to Los Angeles. So that's how we got the property. Real close

friends. In fact, when I was going to school at Cal, I used to go visit him in L.A. Real nice fella, real good family friend.

MK: So that land was with your family from before the war then?

SK: It was owned by the Hosakas and then nineteen. . . . I think right after the war we bought that property from him.

MK: And reading the newspaper articles about the building, they said that your family got the architect Guy Rothwell . . .

SK: Yes, Guy Rothwell.

MK: . . . to design the building. Now how did that happen? That's a pretty well-known architect.

SK: Yes, Guy Rothwell, Kaimukī Dry Goods, right across the street, used Guy Rothwell in their renovation at that time. So, (Dorothy Sumida) [of Kaimukī Dry Goods], says, "Oh, why don't you use this Guy Rothwell? He's a good architect." That's how we got to use that architect because he was the architect for the renovation of the Kaimukī Dry Goods. And the same time, the interior, too, was Grand Rapids store fixture they used. So we used that same thing, too.

WN: So that area was a vacant lot?

SK: No, it was a grocery store there at that time. It was the Aotani grocery store. They moved to 12th Avenue. Then later on, they were operating Aotani Fountain, whatever. But they were running the grocery store. At that time we bought it, Aotani was a tenant over there, but we became the landlord. So when we said we're going to put up a new building, then they had to move to 12th Avenue. They bought that place there. So it was very good for all.

WN: So that building was torn down? The Aotani?

SK: Yes, torn down, and then we put up a new building. (Ben Hayashi) Contracting Company was the (contractor). They were one of the big contracting companies at that time. He put up the building. So that's why it's a nice building. Even now, still looks good. Guy Rothwell did a good job.

MK: And then were you involved in any way in the design of the building inside?

SK: Yes, I kind of helped them. I said, "I want a high ceiling." I said, "I don't like to have any columning." So 5,000 square feet with fifty-feet frontage. But he was able to span a column on the side so that there's no column in between. So structurally, it's a well-built building. It was supposed to go up some more but we decided not to build an upstairs. Fortunately we didn't, good thing we didn't do it.

MK: So how many stories does that building have now?

SK: Only one story. But it's high. That's why it's kind of spacious, the store. Of course, now, Payless split it up.

MK: And then when you folks incorporated and started Kaimukī Pharmacy, who were the officers? How did you folks divide up the duties?

SK: I was in charge so we just incorporated. It was strictly for the Kaimukī Pharmacy so I ran the store. Then I paid for everything: real property tax, water, and everything. So [M. Kosasa and Sons] was the company that formed it (and was the landlord), but I ran the operation. Of course, at that time, when we first started, we had that Chiyo Florist. There was a florist in there, and Evergreen Coffee Shop was part of it there, and then we had the Hasegawa Beauty Salon in the corner. So we had three tenants to help pay for the rent besides myself. Hasegawa, he was this Captain Hasegawa from the police department long time ago.

MK: So were you also given the job of being like the landlord for your neighbors?

SK: Yes. Of course, they paid their rent (M. Kosasa and Sons).

WN: Shall we stop here?

MK: Yeah, why don't we stop so that we can focus in on the pharmacy.

WN: The next time, we can get in on the Kaimukī Pharmacy. Is that all right?

SK: Yes.

MK: We'll stop here.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 37-9-5-01

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sidney Kosasa (SK)

Honolulu, Hawai'i

October 5, 2001

BY: Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

- SK: . . . Especially Dr. [John] Kometani. He really helped. So we had good relationships. There were about fifty doctors in that [Medical Arts Building]. Then after Kuakini put up the medical center, then a lot of doctors because of convenience, moved over there. Right now, there's still a few doctors, but mostly dentists and accountants [at the Medical Arts Building]. Some are retired, too, like [Nobuyuki] Nakasone. Quite a few retired, too. So then after that we sold the pharmacy [there in 1938].
- MK: And then that pharmacy that you had at Medical Arts, was it strictly prescription or did you have some over-the-counter?
- SK: Very little bit over-the-counter, mostly prescription. That's all we concentrate on, prescription. Over-the-counter was very few items because all the patients that came was just for the prescription and we fill it.
- MK: And then because you had the two businesses, the Kaimukī Pharmacy and the Medical Arts, what was your role for both of those places?
- SK: I was pharmacist, too, so I helped at the Medical Arts store. I helped fill prescriptions down there and worked with the doctors, too. Not only that, because we had the Medical Arts, a lot of times if the patient lived in Kaimukī, the doctor would call up Kaimukī Pharmacy and tell them get the prescription filled over there or for us to deliver it to the patient. That worked good in both ways.
- WN: What side took up more of your time?
- SK: Well, later on I, more or less, was kind of supervising, running the store. Like Kaimukī Pharmacy, when we first started I was the pharmacist, too, so I was filling all the prescriptions. Then later on, I hired a pharmacist to help me so I can overall watch the operation of the store.
- WN: So once you hired a pharmacist for Medical Arts, then you could concentrate more on your drugstore?
- SK: Yes, on the drugstore operation.

MK: In those days, did you have preference? Like did you like managing the business part more than being a pharmacist? How did you feel, because there're two different types of work.

SK: You see, the drugstore, as it is right now, besides prescriptions they carry everything else—over-the-counter, candies. Like Kaimukī, we used to sell toys and all other items, too. So that also helped generate the business. Prescription, at that time, was only a small portion of the volume for our Thrifty stores and Kaimukī Pharmacy. As I say, at that time too, even to right now, of course, very few doctors buy drugs [directly] from McKesson. But the old days, they all used to, just like the plantation days you go to the doctor, the doctor gave them medication. It took quite a while before the doctor decided to write prescriptions. But at the Medical Arts, younger doctors came in, so they wrote more prescriptions. And now, more so, because the drugs are so expensive that the doctors cannot afford to buy and give it to the patient, although they do charge the patient. Now, the drugs are so expensive that if the patient don't pay, they're in a problem. Overall, since I grew up in a grocery store, I'm a retailer so I enjoy meeting the public and serving besides prescription.

WN: Did you have Mid-Pacific still at this time when you had Medical Arts?

SK: No. When we opened up Kaimukī Pharmacy, I closed up. I sold the Mid-Pacific Drug. Then, later on we opened others: Downtown Thrifty Drugs, and we opened up in Kam[ehameha] Shopping Center. We had a drugstore there, and we had one in Hawai'i Kai. They were all Thrifty Drugs.

WN: Let's talk about your Thrifty Drugs that you opened up on Fort Street [in 1955]. What made you do that?

SK: As I say, I always wanted to open up a bigger drugstore. Longs [Drug Stores] came in already at that time. I figured, well, Downtown could stand another drugstore. So then, we opened up a big drugstore there. That was about 7,000-square-foot store, too. That's when I hired this guy, [Jean] "Red" Wages from Longs. He was the manager, and he was familiar with the chain drug[store] operation, especially the newspaper ads and all that stuff. So he helped me in the overall newspaper advertising, buying merchandise, and all this stuff so that we can be competitive with Longs. I had friends in Thrifty Drugs, L.A., so one of the things about Thrifty Drugs, L.A., they were selling ice cream cones for five cents. So, we started that in Thrifty Drugs Downtown. Boy, we sold a lot of ice cream for five cents.

(Laughter)

That used to bring a lot of customers into our stores, too. Longs didn't have any ice cream at that time, so we thought we'd carry something.

MK: How did you folks decide to open up Thrifty Drugs on Fort Street? Why that location?

SK: That location was vacant a little while, so my father, myself, and my brother pulled our assets together and we opened up. That's where MNS Limited came out. Morita and Neil and Sidney, that's the corporation we formed and we opened up Downtown. I forgot who was the original landlord.

MK: [Norman] Jemal?

WN: Jemal Building?

SK: Yes, I think that's what it is, Jemal Building. He had the building, so we leased it from him. (We were paying rent to Mr. J. Edwin Whitlow of Honolulu Business College.)

MK: How did you get Mr. Wages to work for you? Because he used to work for Longs. How did you get him?

SK: I guess he was a back-end manager and Longs had a front-end manager, back-end manager, and overall store manager. So he figured, he cannot get promoted to store manager, so good opportunity. I think some salesman told us he talked to Wages—they used to call him "Red" Wages—and so Red came up to interview and he said, "Yeah, I'll help you run the drugstore." Similar to Longs, see. Since he worked at Longs for over thirteen years, from San Jose time, he was familiar with Longs' operations, and that's how we got started.

WN: So you hired him on salary?

SK: Yes. We paid him a good salary, better than what he was getting at Longs.

WN: When you hired, for example, when you hired Mr. [Gilbert] Nikaido and Mr. Wages, what did you look for in a manager?

SK: Like Wages, he helped because I didn't know too much about chain drug operations. Red worked in it, so he was familiar with chain drug, especially advertising, and getting merchandise, and how to merchandise like what they have at Longs right now. He helped me on there. Mr. Nikaido, he's strictly a pharmacist, so he was working in my Thrifty Kaimukī at the start, but when we opened at Medical Arts, I put him in charge over there. It was strictly filling prescriptions, so he didn't have much over-the-counter things. His main line was prescriptions, and he was a good pharmacist. One man. Usually requires two pharmacists to fill the number of prescriptions that he was filling, but he was so fast and well organized, and he had a lot of things prepared already ahead. He was really good. He was just like two pharmacists in one. He was that good. He was an honor student at the pharmacy school at Washington State—I think Washington State or Washington he went to. But I knew him from childhood time, too. He's a Kaimukī boy.

MK: Mr. Nikaido is born and raised local. Mr. Wages, he came from the Mainland. Did you have any reservations or worries about hiring someone that was from the Mainland?

SK: No, I hired Wages because I needed his expertise in running a chain. Although I controlled the overall operation, I let him kind of run the store. He taught me a lot about how to write newspaper ads, like that. How to lay out the ads, and how to set them all up like similar to Longs, because we didn't know how to do that before. He helped a lot on that.

WN: Reading the newspaper articles when Thrifty Drugs opened, it said it's a Mainland self-service chain outlet.

SK: Yes.

WN: What does that mean?

SK: It's like Longs. The old days, we used to have a cash register at every counter, and if you have a prescription we had a register in the prescription department. In the cosmetic, we had the register in the cosmetic department, and then we had one in the front. But when we made it to self-service, it's just what you see right now. Everything is brought out to the front. They bring you a basket or something, and that's why they call it self-service checkout. In other words, they helped themselves and bring the merchandise to the checkout, whereas the old days, we went behind the counter. If someone wanted drug, we used to get it for them. Cosmetic, we used to. We used to have a showcase, so nobody went behind the counter. When Longs opened up, we find out that everything is—they call it "gondola," those gondola shelves in the aisles where your shelves stuck out. And that was new. When I used to work for Benson Smith, we didn't have those things. Everything was behind the counter. We had some drugs around, but we're always under control. It was, more or less, like security, you know. Times have changed, they can self-serve, and everything is. . . . Of course, that might increase the pilferage, but still yet, we figure overall the sales offset the pilferage. That's how self-service started out.

MK: Did it increase the square footage devoted to merchandise by having it set up like that?

SK: Overall, square foot and the size of the store is the same, but since you have a lot of the gondola on the aisles, that exposes more merchandise to the customer. Just like supermarket, whatever you see right now. Every department had canned goods, or frozen, or whatever. It was just like that in the drugstore. We had toy department, we had a housewares department, we had a stationery—school supplies—and all that stuff. It was all set up in each department, but it was all self-service.

MK: How did that affect the people that you employed in terms of numbers of people you employed?

SK: They became cashiers, and then they became stockers, too. They stocked the shelves and everything. When they're not busy, they get the merchandise, and fill up the shelves. You use less help though, because you don't have employees on every counter. An example like that is Shirokiya. That's why, Shirokiya get hard time making money, too. Because you look at Shirokiya, there's a salesclerk at every counter. Now, I notice that they're opening on the second floor, they're making like self-service now. Before, used to have every counter, that's why was expensive. Labor gets expensive.

MK: In those days in Honolulu, how many places were there that was like your store? You know, self-service. . . .

SK: As I said, the old days, when we had our drugstore like Kaimukī Pharmacy, we had a lot of showcases all around. But when Longs opened up Downtown, we didn't know what it was, but I learned about self-service. I went to the Mainland, I see some other drugstores doing the same thing, so the fixtures goes with it, too. Before, everything was in the showcase, but now everything is exposed.

MK: I think one of the articles said that you had these fixtures with *pukas* and you could change it.

SK: Yes, we called it Peg-Board. So then, on the side we had Peg-Board, and all you do is, we had those metal things that we insert. Right now, even the manufacturer changed. Now they all got a hole so that you could hang those things. Before, was all in a box, see. But

now, everything is, even if it's a box, they have that thing it can hang on. That's how it's self-service.

WN: So when you had Kaimukī Drugs, Kaimukī Drugs was still sort of the old style.

SK: Yes, but we slowly changed over. We got rid of all the showcases.

WN: Can you remember the difference in the number of employees you had at Kaimukī before the change and after? Was it a dramatic amount of change?

SK: No, we retained the same amount of employees, only we made them cashiers. Except the cosmetic girl, she had a counter, but we didn't have a register there. So that way the cosmetic girl could help with the lipstick or facial, whatever. But aside from that, and the pharmacist inside filling prescription, everything else is self-service.

MK: How did the customers react to this type of new shopping?

SK: I guess, they liked it. They liked it because they were able to handle the merchandise themselves and look at the merchandise, so they feel more comfortable. Otherwise, they always have to ask. The old days, they always have to ask the clerk for this item or whatever it is. So it made it much easier for the customers to buy the merchandise. Everything was exposed. Even cough syrup. Of course, nowadays they getting more educated so they know what kind cough syrup they need or they see them advertised, so they help themselves.

WN: I know you mentioned Longs a lot, as a competitor, you know, similar kinds of operations. . . .

SK: Yes. Because Longs was the only one Mainland drug chain that came to Hawai'i and opened up the self-service type.

WN: Were there other companies doing self-service?

SK: No, nobody else.

WN: What about Chun Hoon [Pharmacy]?

SK: Until Longs moved in, then they kind of changed every drugstore, too. They all start to open them all up to self-service, but up until then everything was, as I said, there was Hollister Drugs, Stewart's Pharmacy, Benson Smith [& Company]. And I used to work Benson Smith, too, but we always, at that time, we were serving the customers—always serving the customers. Of course that was good in a way, you get to know the customers better. Once you get self-service already, they help themselves.

WN: Did you have any customers saying, "Oh, how come nobody helps me anymore?"

SK: That's why we have salesclerks around, too, in case they needed something, we always help them or get it for them. But, most of the time, we let them alone so they can roam around the store and buy whatever they want. That method of selling is better than always having salesclerks around you waiting for what you want.

MK: And I think one of the articles described it as "one-stop center."

SK: One-stop because the drugstore used to be only drugs and prescription, but then we start carrying the toys, the houseware items, and school supplies. Of course, we carry some of the beverages, too, at that time—ice cream and soft drinks—so we called it “one-stop.” You could get everything. Of course, we weren’t a grocery store, but for snacks, potato chips like that, we all carry those.

MK: Did your drugstores have a fountain?

SK: We had a fountain in our Kaimukī one. When we first started Kaimukī Pharmacy, we had this Evergreen Fountain that ran the fountain, but eventually we wanted more space so we took the fountain out.

MK: It’s hard to find a place like that anymore.

SK: Yes, the old days, part of the drugstore was the fountain. Times have changed. Now, you get McDonalds and all that, Zippy’s. It’s completely different.

WN: So at one time you had the new Thrifty Store, you had Kaimukī Drug, and you had Medical Arts, did you have a warehouse anywhere?

SK: No. Our Downtown was the warehouse, downstairs we had the warehouse, and we used [to] supply all the drugs to Kaimukī. Medical Arts was mostly prescription items, so that we used to buy directly from McKesson. But the other ones, we had the warehouse in Downtown, and each store had a little stockroom in the back. Even now, ABC Stores, they have a stockroom in the back. They carry quite a few, we call it the “back-up stock.” But we did it from the warehouse over here.

MK: Looking at the newspaper articles, it said that in 1958 you got involved with the Affiliated Drugstores group buying. Can you explain how that all worked?

SK: As I say, when Longs open up, I didn’t know where to get all the houseware items, the toys, and a lot of the gift items that Longs was getting from the Mainland. They knew all the different manufacturers, so they were a pretty big chain, so they were buying all directly. But, we had independent. You either have to buy from McKesson or [Theo H.] Davies had a few toys, Amfac [American Factors]. But they themselves, when they sell it to you, it’s just like they were the middleman—from manufacturer, [to] middleman, to us. You cannot compete with Longs, because they were buying directly. So then, I thought I better find out where Longs gets its merchandise, and that’s how I went to New York, and I went to this drug. . . . In fact, there’s the *Drugstore News* here. (SK gets publication.) They’re in New York, I didn’t know nobody. So I went to the *Drugstore News* here and asked them because they know all the chain drugs and everything, and they know the buying group too, so they told me, “Why don’t you go to this buying group?” Associated Buying Group.

So, when I went to New York—really [what] I wanted to do is go and find out something, but I took a lot of chance because I didn’t know nobody else. Then they told me to go to Associated because that was the bigger chain where Longs and all those other guys originally was buying. They had a buying group.

So when I went over there, I think we were doing only about a million dollars [in sales], so they said, “Your chain, do you do over ten million?”

I said, “No.”

He said, "Well, Associated is only for the big drug chains." Like Walgreens and Rite-Aid, all those big boys, because they do over ten million dollars in sales a year. So they tell me, "Why don't you go to Affiliated?" It's a smaller buying group, and they have smaller drug chains with smaller volume.

So I went to Affiliated and I waited until Joe Rosenwald, he's the owner, came in and he said at that time, "We did have a drug chain in Hawai'i, Benson Smith, but they didn't buy anything from us. So if you think you can do it, buy from us as a buying chain." So I showed my Thrifty Drugs layout Downtown, and he was kind of impressed with it. He said, "Okay, we'll accept you as a member in Affiliated."

That was a really big turning point, too, because then I got to meet all the smaller drug chain people first. They helped me a lot, too, because they're all Mainland. At that time, too, they only take one chain from one state so that they don't have competition. So they can exchange ideas between us, so that was the smaller chain.

Then later on, they got bigger, too, and then Affiliated and [National] Association [of Chain Drugs] merged together into one buying group. By that time, the whole buying thing changed. They get Wal-Mart, all those come out. Now everybody buys direct from the manufacturer. Even from the manufacturer you have to buy such huge quantity. But if you get a buying group, the buying group buys together, and although they ship to each store separately, the invoice all goes to Affiliated, so it's like one buying group taking full advantage of the best price. That's how I figure we're able to get the best price that was available because that was direct buying from the manufacturer. And yet, the manufacturer being able to ship to eight different drug chains, so they ship to us, too.

WN: So prior to that, there was no—Affiliated had no dealings with any Hawai'i store.

SK: They had Benson Smith, but Benson Smith was, as I say, a drugstore. They only concentrated on drugs, and they didn't buy any sundries items until Longs came up and opened up the whole drug[store line], carrying all the other items.

MK: When you said that you became a member of Affiliated, were there dues or certain things that were required for your membership in that group?

SK: I forgot how much. We had small dues, only small dues. What the buying group did is, they get a little commission from the manufacturer. So they didn't charge the members hardly anything except for the paperwork, whatever it is, but they were able to get some commission from the manufacturer. The manufacturer was kind of happy to sell to Affiliated because then they could sell more merchandise, especially, too, big quantity. We had a drug buyer, we had a toy buyer, we had a houseware buyer, we had a soft-goods buyer. So the manufacturer goes directly to the buyers and shows the wares. That's why we had the meeting three times a year in New York, twice in New York, once in Chicago that we had an office, buying office. And all the merchandise were displayed and the buyer would present it to us, all the things. So that helped a lot. Even the manufacturer, too, he doesn't have to go to every drug chain. All he has to do is go to the New York office and present it there, and they present to all the drug chains.

MK: Were you obligated to buy just from that group?

SK: Yes, that was a big buying power because then we had a lot of smaller jobbers over here that carry many of the items, but our prices was better than the jobbers, too. So I said to

them, "You're going to give me this price, otherwise I'm not going to buy from you." I was able to get some good prices, especially in the toys and sundries items, because, like over here, they have Webco and all that. I can't remember too many of them, but they carry a lot of the products, Duracell batteries and all that kind of stuff. Westclox, they all carried it locally. But we're able to buy direct, so the price is way better than what we could buy locally. So I could sell it cheaper.

WN: Did you feel any pressure to at least buy some from Amfac and Davies?

SK: Only thing I bought from them was things that we couldn't get through Affiliated or something. I used to buy, but mostly the drug—with Affiliated we didn't buy drugs. It wasn't drug buying. The drugs, we still were buying from McKesson, like that.

MK: Affiliated was strictly non-drug?

SK: Non-drugs. It was housewares, toys, gift items, paper goods, Christmas cards, wraps, I mean everything that you see at Longs like that, except the drugs. Even like drugs, they still yet buy them from Bergen Brunswig over here like we do, too.

WN: So I guess that's a big change buying directly from the Mainland instead of going through a wholesaler.

SK: Oh, big. Oh yes. That's how we were able to survive and meet the Longs' prices, and Longs knows that, too, because Longs was a member of Affiliated, too. Of course, Longs was smart, too. He could join Affiliated and he get all the manufacturers. That's why Affiliated is such a big buying group, they have so many manufacturers. Of course, unless you big enough, you cannot buy directly from the manufacturer, too. Even Longs, he cannot buy the quantity where fifty drug chains buys, so we get a better price. But still, Longs, independently, can buy certain things. But, as you look at it, you cannot compare with Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart, really, the manufacturer makes things strictly for Wal-Mart. But that's how competition is key, you had to be able to buy right or else you can't survive. That's why all these mama-san, papa-san stores goes out of business, I think. They had to buy through local wholesalers.

MK: So when you went through Affiliated, in a way you cut out the local middleman then, to cut your costs to be competitive with Longs.

SK: Yes, but the local jobbers, they know since I belong to Affiliated I get a better price than they do, so they don't question it at all. If I didn't have that buying group, then they say, "Where else you going to buy from?"

MK: Your being part of a big buying group, was that like a trend for other businesses in Hawai'i to look into something like that?

SK: Yes, I know that Liberty House belonged to the department store buying group. That's the only other one that I know, Liberty House. And the supermarkets, they have this—I belong to that, too—FMI, Food Market Institute. Of course, it's not a buying group, but it's a group that gives you a lot of ideas on how to buy merchandise or how to run an operation. That's why the supermarkets, they have a meeting every year, and the manufacturer brings up new ideas to them.

MK: Did Affiliated give you new ideas, too?

SK: Oh yes. Not only that, the other drug chains, lot of them have good ideas and good products. They present it to the buyers at Affiliated, so that we get to take advantage of the merchandise. They say, "Oh, this thing is a hot item that you should carry." At that time, each state had their own drug chain so no more competition, and they're willing to exchange ideas. Of course, something like snow shovel is such a good seller, but. . .

(Laughter)

They always asked, "Sidney, you don't need snow shovels?" Yeah, I remember that.

WN: Let me turn it.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: I was wondering, you have a chain name, Thrifty. . .

SK: Thrifty Drugs.

WN: What kind of an obligation do you have with Thrifty Drugs?

SK: When it comes to a common name like Thrifty, or Payless, or Save-more, it's a common name, so unless they doing business in that state and they've registered—like if Thrifty was in Hawai'i, I cannot use that word "Thrifty" because they are doing business in Hawai'i. But, since they didn't have Thrifty, as a kind of common name, in Hawai'i they're not here, if you register for Hawai'i, then that's your name.

WN: So you just used the name then?

SK: Yeah.

WN: You weren't part of the Thrifty chain?

SK: No.

WN: They didn't mind?

SK: Yeah, but Thrifty was a well-known name in L.A., so I thought well, good idea.

WN: Oh, I see.

SK: Some people think, you know, Thrifty, L.A., we related. But indirectly, as I say, our main operational manager came from Thrifty Drugs, Max Massanari. So, we knew the Thrifty operation pretty good because he was their operational manager, he was the district manager.

MK: When you opened up Thrifty you had Mr. Wages, and then later on, this other person.

SK: Mr. Massanari came later on.

- WN: What did you do about parking? This seems like kind of the time now when more people are driving.
- SK: Yes, parking. Downtown they only had the Marks Garage right in the back on Bethel Street, and that was right behind our store. Kaimukī Pharmacy, we bought a property on Center Street, so we had parking up there. But, otherwise, like Hawai'i Kai we're in the shopping center. Then in Kalihi we're in the shopping center, Kam Shopping Center. If you're going to open up anything, boy, you got to have parking now. Except for Waikīkī. There's so much walk-in traffic.
- WN: And how aware were you of Longs' prices? Did you go to Longs a lot to look to see what they had?
- SK: Oh yes. They were down the street. We used to go and watch their prices and check their ads so that we were very, very competitive with Longs.
- WN: So you knew Longs is selling something for this amount, so you'll. . . .
- SK: Yes, the old days, boy, some of the ads that Longs run and we run, the same ads. The same item we'll be running. I guess, we knew, more or less, what item the customer wants, the same thing, so a couple of items the same prices.
- WN: And how did you determine your mark-up in the early days?
- SK: All depends on the merchandise that you buy. To buy a good price, usually drug chain used to be 33-1/3 percent gross profit. That's the average thing, but if you buy directly, you could sell it below that and still make 33-1/3, see. But, like grocery like that you only make about 20 percent gross profit. So it all depends on the commodity and whether you buy directly or not. That's the advantage Longs had, or all the supermarkets have over the mama- and papa-san stores because they get a better price.
- MK: The other day when you were here you had Hawaiian Host candies over there.
- SK: Yes.
- MK: In the early days with Thrifty's, did you try to get goods from local companies, too? Local items?
- SK: Yes. Well, like Hawaiian Host is a local company, and they were in Kaimukī first. And we really helped them get started because we were in GEM's, too, at that time. So, we help them sell. We put Hawaiian Host [products] in GEM's and in all our Thrifty Stores, so that really helped [Mamoru] Takitani get started. He never forgets that.
- WN: I was reading the newspaper article, and it said here that you folks sold things like comic books, and it said in the article that you folks used to sort of screen the comic books that you would have in the store.
- SK: Well, not too much comic book. We want to make sure we don't carry *Playboy* and all that kind of sex. We keep it out, that's the only thing that we try. It's the magazines that we're very strict on to keep away from our stores.
- MK: Who made the decisions, oh this magazine, but not this one?

- SK: We usually know. If it's for only the sex, we don't want to carry. And we tell the distributor here, that be sure the magazine, don't ship any of it, because overall, those magazine companies, automatically, they ship all the magazines and it's like a consignment that you sell and whatever you return they give you credit. So, they used to send all kinds of magazines, but we sent a list of certain things that we only want you to deliver to us, so we were able to control those magazines.
- WN: And you also did gift wrapping.
- SK: Oh yes, we did a lot of gift wrapping, especially Christmastime, a box of chocolates, like that. Lot of them like Whitman Chocolates—and at that time, not too many Hawaiian Host—but we used to pre-wrap a lot of these for Christmas so that when they buy them, it's already wrapped up together. We all used to have wrapping, especially Christmastime, we had a wrapping counter, so that they could bring the toys and whatever so we used to gift-wrap it. But we don't anymore. The old days, that's just part of the service.
- MK: And then I think that the article also mentioned making keys. Key-making, your store made keys and something else.
- WN: Like key-making, cutting the keys. Did you folks do that?
- SK: Downtown, yes. We used to have a machine that the manufacturer that supplies the keys, supplies the machine, so we used to be able to. We learned that from Red Wages, that was when Longs Downtown was doing that, so that's when we're able to make the keys, too. That was only in the Downtown store that we made the keys. But we knew how to make the keys, though. After you make it you got to smooth out the edges so that the key fits in right.
- WN: I read that Thrifty was open seven days a week, in the evenings as well, and you also had Kaimukī Pharmacy and then you had Medical Arts, how did you juggle all this?
- SK: Each store we have a store manager, and he's responsible for operating the store. Of course [occasionally] we go up to the store and watch them, but the store managers are in charge. Then we have enough staff to work on different shifts, afternoon shift and the morning shift. So that in seven days, you work on Sunday, then you can take off on Monday.
- WN: So you didn't feel that you had to be there all the time?
- SK: No, no. We leave it up to the store manager, but if there's any problem. . . . We have right now, we have a supervisor that goes around to the different stores.
- WN: I was just wondering, when you think about a family-run business, I always think of somebody who's in charge has to be there all the time. It seems like very early on, you decided that you have to trust your managers.
- SK: As I say, through Affiliated and all those things, I found out that you have to pay the managers good, and you have to give them some incentive like a bonus for operating the store. Then they're going to work just as much or longer than you expect because they're working on, I won't say commission, but on the sales. Each store manager is responsible for their store profit and loss. And yet, as a chain we make sure that a smaller store, naturally they don't have as much volume as a big store. But as far as the bonus, like a lot

of them, we compensate that smaller store because they work just as hard but they cannot get the sales like the big stores. Of course the bigger store guy gets a bigger bonus because, naturally, they make more sales and profit. But, each store manager is responsible for their store.

As I say, to operate a chain drugstore you got to get rules and regulations, company policies. Those are things we're really strict on, because otherwise if you don't do that, you cannot control the stores. Dress code, cash handling, charging, everything. We all have a system that everybody has to follow; otherwise—as I say, you don't have to be there because the policy is set. Of course, the supervisor goes around if something is not right. They discuss it with the supervisor.

WN: In those early days, with the Downtown Thrifty and everything, did you folks have get-togethers?

SK: Oh yes, we still have all the managers, we always get together. Even right now, once a month we meet with all the managers. And then, Thursday, managers; Friday, assistant managers. And then, we meet three times a year with all the employees, and that, of course, is at Sheraton [Waikī Hotel], provide dinner for them, too, but we have a meeting. So that all the store managers and employees, they get to know each other, too. So three times a year, on the whole chain, get together—two nights. One is the day shift, then those that work during the day shift, the night shift can go. We open it so they all able to go. [SK is referring to the current ABC Store situation.]

MK: So you had something similar to that when you had like the Downtown store and the Kaimukī store?

SK: Yes, it was a smaller group at that time, so we used to meet in each store, but we never did have a chain kind of a meeting because we used to be able to go to each store and discuss it with the managers and assistants.

MK: Earlier you mentioned you had GEM's drug [concession], we're wondering, when did you get into the GEM's concession?

SK: As I say, GEM is just like Wal-Mart [today]. They were just starting in the discounting because even GEM was from twelve to nine [PM] Monday through Saturday and we were closed on Sunday. It was only one shift of staff, so you save on employees because you only work from twelve to nine. So only one shift, and Sunday they closed so it used to be six days a week. Those days, they used to work forty-eight hours [a week], so we were able to work one shift. But that really helped us because we had the Downtown store and it was competitive. Longs was the main competitor. For us to get additional sales, we needed more sales from some operation and that's how we got into the GEM operation. But GEM, as I say, we had to work on about 20 percent profit. That's why, GEM, like Wal-Mart, be able to sell it cheaper. That's always the policy. But we were able to buy in quantity too, so we able to sell it cheaper, too. There's no secret to the discount operation. If you be able to buy right and sell it right and control your expense, you still come out with a profit. Like Wal-Mart, they operate on like 16 or 17 percent expense, and they operate on a 25 percent gross profit, so they really on a tight. . . . But they start buying directly so they lower the cost of doing business. When you buy right, you can lower your cost, and you can pass the saving on to your customers. That's how Wal-Mart works. Of course, they control their expense down, so they keep their expense down so they're able to come out with a profit.

- WN: So GEM's was just drugs? [GEM was a local discount department store chain in Hawai'i.]
- SK: Yes, just the drug department. Later on we had a grocery department in there, too, but first we were only housewares, hardware, toy department. We handled the stationery and the drugs—the gift wrap, and cards.
- WN: In GEM's?
- SK: Yes.
- WN: What did GEM's handle?
- SK: GEM's was just the operator, that's all. Everybody else was the concession in it. In fact, C.S. Wo [& Sons] was the concession in there, Kim Chow [Shoes] was a concession there, we were all concessions in there.
- WN: And GEM's was located in Kapālama?
- SK: We had the first one in Kapālama, then we opened one in Ala Moana, right now where that, not Home Depot, what is it? Sports Authority. That's it, yes.
- MK: Sports Authority on Ward Avenue.
- SK: Yes, that was the second GEM's. And we had in Waipahu, too, so we had three GEM's stores, and in Hilo we had one, too, smaller one.
- WN: So you had concessions in all the GEM's stores?
- SK: All the GEM stores, yes.
- WN: Wow.
- MK: And originally it was a membership kind of operation.
- SK: Yes, it's a membership. You had to pay five dollars, I think. And then, you become a member. So that was a pretty good method of doing it, because GEM collected five dollars right away, and yet, people figure they get a good price, too.
- MK: I remember going to GEM's as a kid, and my parents showing a card or something.
- SK: Yes, you had to show a card.
- WN: It stands for Government Employees Marketplace?
- SK: GEM is Government Employees Membership.
- WN: Membership. I'm wondering this GEM's here in Ward was called Parkview. . . .
- SK: Parkview Drug.
- WN: Yeah, because you're not only with Affiliated, but you're also affiliated with Parkview Drugs?

SK: Yes, he was a member with us. In fact, the Parkview Drug came in after I went to GEM. I was in GEM first, and then later on, Parkview Drug got into GEM on the Mainland. Phil Small is the chairman of Parkview Drug, and when we got a meeting, he told me, "Hey Sidney, I hear you run the GEM department in Hawai'i, drug department." He said, "How is it?"

I said, "I tell you, Phil, it's really good because lot of traffic. They bring in a lot of traffic and a lot of sales so they're going help your business." Because Parkview Drug was kind of the smaller of the drug chains. Katz Drug was a bigger drug chain in Kansas City at that time, and Parkview was one of the smaller drug chains. So that's why I know the Parkview people very well.

MK: When you were running the GEM concession, there were lawsuits, right?

SK: Lawsuit, because there was a fair trade [law] in Hawai'i at that time, but it wasn't really enforced. In other words, you have to sell [merchandise] at a certain price. Drug items, cosmetics, everything. Like cosmetic was 40 percent [markup], and drug was 33-1/3 percent, that was the minimum price. You cannot go below that price. Right now they have that cost plus 6 percent as the lowest, you see. But cost plus 6 percent just becomes unmanageable because it all depends on how you buy. But that was the fair trade [law]. GEM was selling below that price. At that time, too, I told GEM, "It's a lawsuit against me, against Sidko Sundries, but, you got to pay for all the legal fees and everything because I'm not going to be responsible for it." So they [GEM] paid for every legal fee, but I had to go to court, make an appearance because different manufacturers filed a suit against GEM and against Sidko Sundries at that time. But eventually, in the legislature, they overrode the thing out and the fair trade [law] was off [the books]. Now, fair trade is off nationally. In fact, many, many states didn't have fair trade at all already. Hawai'i was one of the few states that had fair trade. That's why when all the discount houses opened, they just broke up the whole price fixing [fair trade law]. It becomes a price fixing. [In August 1959, several Honolulu businessmen filed suit in Circuit Court protesting SK's low prices in GEM stores, claiming SK was violating Hawai'i's now defunct fair trade law.]

WN: Right. The people that brought the suit against GEM's and you were. . . .

SK: Were like Johnson & Johnson, and Revlon, and [others]. But because I belong to Affiliated, when I went to New York I spoke to someone. He said, "Oh, they want to stop selling drugs to you." He said, "In New York there are diverters, they call it—cosmetic diverters and drug diverters." In other words, the manufacturers like Parke-Davis, or Lilly, or any of the drug manufacturers, they sell overseas to Mexico like that at a lower price than they would sell to the United States. So then the diverters would buy the drugs from Mexico, and bring them into the United States, and then sell it to the retailer. A lot of prices are way below what the manufacturer will sell to the retailer. Since Revlon and Johnson & Johnson said they're not going to sell to me, at Affiliated [said], "Oh, you go to the diverter, they'll sell you all you want."

(Laughter)

That's how I was able to bring the drugs in directly. So the representative down here, they say, "Heck, I'm not going to stop selling to Sidney because if I don't, he brings it in from the Mainland and I lose all my commission." And only through Affiliated I was able to do that. If not, I couldn't survive. That's why GEM, when they had the drug

department at the very start, they had a hard time stocking the shelf because none of the wholesalers would sell to GEM in the drug department. There were a few who were selling, but the price was not right. Tommy Ching was a member of GEM, so he asked me if I want to run the drug department. He was the vice president of Liberty [Bank]. So he told me, "Why don't you take over the drug concession?" and that's how I took it over.

WN: Were you pretty confident that you were going to win this?

SK: I wasn't too concerned about it because I know that fair trade was off in many of the states, so I figure Hawai'i, sooner or later, they're going to be off fair trade. Although the suit came up, eventually through legislation, they were able to [eliminate] fair trade. That's why now there's no set pricing at all.

MK: So it just really opened it up then.

SK: Opened it up, yes.

MK: You can go anywhere for your goods and set the prices.

SK: Yes. So it opened up in Hawai'i. But on the Mainland there was a lot of places was off fair trade, so they were selling. That's why when they had GEM on the Mainland stores, they had no problem because there was no fair trade.

WN: I noticed [Robert] Stewart was one of the . . .

SK: Yes, yes. He had the Stewart's Pharmacy, and they were selling [drugs] at kind of full price, so you know, he figured he's going to get all the drugstore guys together, put the boycott against McKesson and those other guys [who would] sell to GEM. They going to stop buying from them. That's the pressure they tried to put on.

WN: And I was reading here that the GEM attorney at that time was Robert Dodge. He's a very well-known figure.

SK: Robert Dodge, yes. I know him. He lived in my neighborhood, too.

WN: What kind of a man was he?

SK: A nice guy. He was a sharp attorney, too. He was a friendly attorney.

MK: He was very active in the Democratic party, right?

SK: Yes, he was very active.

WN: I was wondering because of this lawsuit and everything, were there any hard feelings with the Stewarts?

SK: Well, all the pharmacists were against me, too. But, like everything else, it cooled after the fair trade went off. But, at that time, to make a salt in the wound, I knew [Yasutaka] Fukushima. He was an attorney, Fukushima, and he was a Republican. Harold Okimoto ran Island Tobacco, and Yasutaka was the attorney for Island Tobacco. Island Tobacco and I were good friends, so Harold Okimoto told Yasutaka to appoint me to the State Board of Pharmacy. Yasutaka Fukushima controlled Bill [Governor William F.] Quinn,

Republican. So they appointed me on the state board, (chuckles) and it was big uproar. Yasutaka called me up and said, "Hey, how come all of a sudden the pharmacists calling not to put you on the board?" I told him about the GEM incident and he said, "The heck with it."

WN: (Laughs) So did you go on the board?

SK: Yes, I was on the board for about a year and a half until Bill Quinn got off the governorship [in 1962].

WN: Did you consider yourself a Republican?

SK: Not exactly Republican. Republican, in a way, but I have good friends like Dan Inouye, Dan Akaka, good friends in the Democratic party. I don't say that I'm a Republican, I just say that I'm a neutral. But of course, I was, more or less, pro-Republican because they're more for the business people. Democratic party wants to have strong labor, that's why.

MK: How long did you have your GEM's concession?

SK: Gee, let's see, I had it for quite a while. About ten years, I think. (From 1959 to 1972.)

MK: So you still had it even after you opened up your ABC Stores?

SK: No, just at that time, after I pulled out of GEM, since I had this discount experience, I thought I'd open up an ABC Store. (I opened my first ABC Store in 1964.) And that's why I called it ABC Discount Store and opened up one in Waikīkī. I opened up in Downtown first, and then in Waikīkī after that. But, you know, good experience because I got to know the discount operation, too.

WN: By the time you ended the GEM, what stores did you have?

SK: I had (five) Thrifty Stores at that time [1972]. (I also had one at Medical Arts and six ABC Stores.)

WN: You had Thrifty in Downtown.

SK: Downtown. I had them in Kam[ehameha] Shopping Center, Hawai'i Kai, and then I had Kaimukī. Thrifty Kaimukī Pharmacy. So, those are the ones that I had then. I had GEM stores.

WN: Did you have Medical Arts still?

SK: Oh yes, I still had the Medical Arts. Those are the original ones, first. So there were about (twelve) stores, I guess, [plus] the GEM stores.

MK: I'm curious, how did you get involved into putting stores into shopping centers? Like Kam[ehameha] Shopping Center and the Hawai'i Kai?

SK: I knew somebody through Bishop Estate, and they said they're going to open up [Kamehameha] Shopping Center in Kalihi, so if I want to run a drug department in there so that's how I started out with that. Then, Hawai'i Kai opened up another shopping

center, so then I opened up in that one, too. And later on I opened up in Ala Moana Shopping Center, too. ABC Store.

MK: So you had an idea that shopping centers in these outlying areas, suburban areas, was. . . .

SK: Oh yes, already through Affiliated, I knew that on the Mainland there were a few shopping centers already, so I figured it's a good opportunity to open in a shopping center. A lot of these things, as I say, through my Mainland connections that I was able to gain a lot of knowledge.

WN: I think next time we'll go with ABC. I just wanted to ask you about Sidko Sundries.

SK: Sidko Sundries, that's GEM. That's the concession. That's only in GEM.

WN: So you still had MNS.

SK: Yes, but to get a concession I had to put a name on. So I didn't want to put "Thrifty Drug" inside there because it's not Thrifty Drug, it's just a separate corporation, too, at that time. I called it "Sidko." Sidney, short is Sid, and Kosasa, so Sidko.

WN: Was the concession—was there a sign that said Sidko Sundries or was it just. . . .

SK: No, it's just Sidko Sundries. In general, they don't know. It's a drug department in GEM, that's all. But we ran the drug department.

MK: So all the departments in GEM, they were all concessions, then?

SK: Every one, a concession, and the lease is only for thirty days.

WN: Oh.

SK: That's why GEM management had a lot of power. They insist you sell it at this price. If you don't, they say, "You only get thirty days' lease, we can kick you out." So that's a big clout they had. But later on, as I said, the Parkview Drug, they're good friends of mine. Before Parkview bought out GEM, they were running the concession on the Mainland. They had about thirty stores in GEM at the time. They were running all the drug departments, and Drug Fair also had about eight drugstores in GEM in Washington D.C. area. So there was Drug Fair, and they were also a member of Affiliated, too, so I knew all of them very well. So Affiliated, Drug Fair was running on the East Coast area of GEM, and the rest of them up to San Francisco was Parkview.

Then later on—the GEM operator was all developers from Denver. There were about three fellas—I can't think of their name—anyway, they developed GEM. Then they decided, "I'm going to sell GEM," but they put the pressure on Parkview, too. They said, "Parkview, you got a drugs department, but if you want to buy GEM, we'll sell it to you; otherwise we'll sell it to Drug Fair." So they pit one against the other one. So Parkview Drug had no choice, they're the smaller one, said, "Okay, we'll buy GEM out." So that's what happened, they bought GEM out. But there was a lot of pressure on Parkview, because they were only a drug concession in GEM. The same thing with us, they only had thirty-day lease. They can be kicked out, so. When they took over, that's why it changed to Parkview GEM, see.

WN: We were wondering, too, you're used to being your own boss when you had Thrifty and so forth, and then moving into GEM's where really, there are people. . . .

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 37-10-6-01

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sidney Kosasa (SK)

Honolulu, Hawai'i

October 12, 2001

BY: Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

MK: . . . just going to ask you maybe one or two questions about Thrifty Drugs, and then go into ABC Stores. Today's session will just be all ABC Stores, yeah?

First of all, we wanted to know, how long did you continue with the Thrifty Drugs?

SK: Well, we had Kaimukī Pharmacy first (opened December 1949). And Thrifty Drugs, we opened up in 1955 in Downtown. We had it for about thirteen [years]—[until] about '67. We had Downtown. But in between there we had [a store] in Kam[ehameha] Shopping Center (opened June 1959), [and another in] Hawai'i Kai (opened July 1963). So all within the thirteen years we had those Thrifty Drug Stores. So they were all strictly drugstores.

MK: And what happened to the Thrifty Drug Stores?

SK: Well, like Kam Shopping Center, when the lease ran out, just at that time Longs came in that area, too. So they didn't want to lease. For us it was just right, we didn't want to compete with Longs right in the Kam Shopping Center. So we pulled out of that one after the lease ran out. We had a ten-year lease there with Bishop Estate.

Then at Hawai'i Kai, that was with Kaiser Estate. We had a lease in Hawai'i Kai. That's when Kaiser developed that whole area, you know. So we were there for quite a while. Oh, I think about, let's see, that was '65, '75, '85, '95. We'd been there about thirty-some-odd years in Hawai'i Kai. (It closed June 1996.) Then when Longs and Safeway opened up—you know, Costco and all those guys—the traffic stopped all over there. So this Hawai'i Kai [shopping center], they call it Koko Marina Shopping Center, became really weak. We were the only ones with Foodland and Ben Franklin. Even Ben Franklin, they changed over from a variety store to (a crafts store). Foodland is still there. We pulled out after our lease ran out. Then we rented for another five years, but we hardly made any money there. The pharmacy is expensive. We had to have our pharmacist there. We had a few prescriptions. Straub [Clinic and Hospital] had a clinic up there, too. So we were getting the prescriptions from there, but still yet the majority of the traffic moving all over there.

Actually, Koko Marina Shopping Center now is more like Kaimukī. Only restaurants, like that. So [as a] shopping center, even Foodland, I don't think they're making [profits]. They're just surviving. That's why, Ben Franklin [Crafts], it's arts and crafts now. So really, there's nothing. We were the only drugstore there at that time.

And then the last was Kaimukī Pharmacy. That Thrifty, Kaimukī. Then we closed that up (in October 1995). So then we just concentrated on ABC Stores.

MK: And that Kaimukī one, how come you folks closed that one up?

SK: We closed that up and then we had this Payless Shoe Source, so we made a ten-year lease with them. We own the building.

WN: Oh, you still own it?

SK: Yes, we own the building. So we got a good rent [agreement] from them.

WN: Business-wise, why did you have to close down Kaimukī?

SK: Well, it's the pharmacist. Because the pharmacist, at that time, we were paying about thirty dollars an hour. They get two pharmacists, sixty dollars an hour. The pharmacists' salary really ate up all the profit. We got the store manager, too. The pharmacists, now, they're getting about 60,000 [dollars] (annually) now. The pharmacists' salary really started going up. Like supermarket, they got a few pharmacists in there. But if you're just a free-standing drugstore, pretty hard to survive. You know, with a third party, profit way down. You operate at only about 20 percent profit on prescriptions. So controlled by the third party now. Even like Longs, they don't make money on prescriptions, but at least it brings in the traffic to them.

WN: You said \$60,000 a year, right, for pharmacy?

SK: Let's see now, \$60,000 a year, yes.

WN: (Laughs) Wow.

SK: They are highly paid. Because we pay our managers about \$40-, 50,000 a year. Besides that, they get the bonuses, too. But the pharmacists also get the bonuses. The labor costs are the highest.

WN: I know you said that Kaimukī and Hawai'i Kai wasn't doing too well because of the price of pharmacy, but what about Kaimukī as a business area?

SK: Even that has slowed down quite a bit. Because the biggest problem is parking. No more parking. Only in the back side, back of Koko Head Avenue, municipal parking, but that's meter parking, too. And on top of that, lot of restaurants are around now, so when they go to a restaurant, they take about an hour. So really, for the retailers, it's tough. The only other guy that was doing pretty good moved down, Kaimukī Dry Goods. They moved down to 10th and Wai'alae [avenues] there. Even for them, now, it's little tough, too. Even [the sale of] fabrics getting tough.

That's why, [there's] no more supermarket in Kaimukī, either. It's getting to be more like restaurants only. Kaimukī as a business district is gone now. Unfortunately, but no more parking. Now, just this morning's paper, I was reading, the merchants are complaining, because of the construction. So they have taken out the parking on Wai'alae Avenue. So that must [have] made it more worse. I feel kind of sorry for the merchants down there.

WN: So I guess Kaimukī is sort of symbolic of the changes, right, in retailing and how Hawai'i buyers. . . .

- SK: Hawai'i has changed, yes.
- WN: When you think about it, you have that Kaimukī Shopping Center that has their own parking, yeah?
- SK: Well, down there, they have their own parking and there's a Times Supermarket. So at least the people get to shop and there's no shopping center up there (in Kaimukī), no more parking. There's really no reason to go shopping in Kaimukī unless you have specific reasons.
- MK: And I guess Kaimukī is sandwiched in between the Kaimukī Longs and Wai'alaie-Kāhala Shopping Center [Kāhala Mall], yeah?
- SK: Yeah, and Longs is in Wai'alaie-Kāhala, too. It's a matter of convenience, though. You got to have parking. That's the reason why. Kaimukī don't have parking. It's, more or less, kind of a strip center. The old days, it was all right, parking in the back and little bit. But customers, like now, they like to park right in the front. They don't like to walk.
- WN: What about H-1 Freeway when that was built, did that affect . . .
- SK: That affected that, too. Because they bypass Kaimukī. All of those affected Kaimukī. So Kaimukī now is, more or less, like either restaurants or financial [institutions], you know, like banks. That way it's convenience, but aside from that, there's really nothing much.
- MK: We know that in 1965 you started the ABC Stores. How did you get the idea to start ABC?
- SK: Well, I went to a chain drug[stores] meeting in Miami—we had a meeting at that time at Miami Beach. Right now, they meet at West Palm Beach, so that's little further away from Miami. But at that time, way back in 1965, the big hotels were all in Miami. So I went to the meeting. We stayed at—gee, I forgot what hotel. It was a big hotel, anyway, because they had the convention, our meeting, over there. Then Minnie and I started looking around. There was a little kind of a shopping mall in Miami. And yet, we noticed all the people all around there, were going to the shopping area to go shop. So we figured, gee, Waikīkī, one of these days, is going to have lot of hotels around. And we got to look around for locations, so we'll anchor ourselves with our shops around there [Waikīkī]. That's how we got started on it.
- So when we came back from Miami, we started looking all around Waikīkī (for locations). There was hardly any [hotels] around Waikīkī. Because [there were] none of those—Hawaiian Regent Hotels, none of those. Not even Chris Hemmeter built hotels there. None of them. Only sporadic. Only Halekūlani was one of them, and Royal Hawaiian Hotel, and Moana Hotel. That was the only [major] hotels there. But I figured, Hawai'i is going to be, one of these days, like Miami. So sure enough, it came. After statehood came, then Waikīkī became kind of a tourist destination.
- WN: While you were in Miami, did you see things like convenience stores in the area?
- SK: No. There were no convenience stores. Only, I think, one place we found out was in Europe. We were upstairs, restaurant, and on the corner there was like a convenience store. So while we were eating, she and I were looking outside there. "Gee, look at all the customers going in and out over there, buying food—I mean, snack items. So I think, hey, we can start a convenience store in that beach area. I think we might do something."

When we pulled out of GEM, we had the discount theory, so actually I started out with a discount drugs and cosmetics first. No groceries or anything. But then later on, picked up some locations where Hawaiian Regent, Waikīkī Beach Tower, Hyatt Regency came up. All of that. Before, it was nothing. A small Aoki Store used to be right way up Paoakalani [Avenue]. They had to close out. Ibaraki [Store] had to close out. And there was a Larry Pang—where we have a store, number fourteen—he had a grocery store there. So I thought we'll buy out his grocery store and we'll open up my ABC Store there. We were just thinking of only drugs and cosmetics and nothing about groceries. But this guy, Larry Pang, tell me, "Hey, why don't you go carry groceries? Because there's no more grocery stores around here anymore."

So I said, "Gee, but I don't know. But we're not going to carry meat or any of this."

He said, "No, you don't have to. You go carry all the other prepared food like that."

Yet I grew up in a grocery store, so I knew we operate only at about 20 percent gross profit. Grocery stores is low gross profit but fast turnover. So I thought, "In Waikīkī, cannot operate with the [low] grocery prices with the high rent and everything."

And Larry Pang said, "No, no. You could charge full 40 percent."

At first, I was hesitant. But you raise 'em up and you sell 'em like that, they got no choice. They're going to have to buy from you. And that's how we start carrying groceries and we start carrying liquor.

That's how we got started. Then we started carrying prepared food. Then we started getting calls for T-shirts and all that kind of stuff. So then we start putting T-shirts. Of course, we had a few souvenir items, you know, because that's what the tourist wants. I was just like a drugstore, we still carried the souvenir items and school supplies like that, but carrying the T-shirts, and then grocery items. In fact, we were carrying groceries [in Waikīkī] way before 7-Eleven. I don't know if 7-Eleven came way after us, you know, but then they started to carry the grocery items like that, fast foods. But we were one of the first, original. Started with the health and beauty aids and combined it with the groceries, put it together. That formula worked pretty good.

WN: Now, your first store was on Kalākaua Avenue and Beach Walk.

SK: Yes.

WN: Can you kind of tell us how you acquired that site and what you sold?

SK: Well, that's the time we started looking around for locations. There was one [store] on Lewers [Street], small shop, you know. They were carrying woodwork, you know, wood stuff. So we thought, "Let's open up over there." But then in the meantime, this guy had a furniture store, carry nothing but Chinese antique furniture. He wanted to sell out. So I said, "We go buy his lease out." He was happy, too, because he wanted to get out. I think he had enough money, too, so I don't know what he did with all the furniture and whatnot. But we took over. It was kind of a small place.

Through my experience in the GEM discount house, we thought we're going to open a [discount store] because when I was on the Mainland, there was a discount health and beauty aid store. They were selling discount drugs and cosmetics. So I figured, "Well, I'll use the same format and open up." In fact, we had prescriptions in one of the stores, but

we closed the prescription department up because most of the tourists brought their own medication. At that time, in the state of Hawai'i, you cannot fill a Mainland prescription in Hawai'i.

MK: Oh?

SK: It had to be from a local doctor. So if you want a prescription or something, you got to go to a local doctor and the local doctor has to write the prescription. That makes sense because anybody could make a false [order]—you know, get a prescription pad and go write a false name and everything trying to have a narcotic. Now, you could fill a Mainland prescription. So they check it out. But that's why, most of the prescriptions now, is filled out by Longs and everybody, but Waikīkī, hardly any drugstore. There's only one drugstore, but he hardly fills any prescriptions. Most of the tourists, just like all of us, we bring our own medication when we travel.

MK: You were mentioning that that first ABC Store that you opened up in Waikīkī, you used the discount store concept. How were you able to have the discounted prices in Waikīkī when maybe back then even the rents were higher than elsewhere?

SK: That's why, as I say, on the Thrifty Drug Stores, even right now, Longs anyway, the minimum price they sell on the prescriptions, they make one-third profit, minimum. If you buy direct, you make 40 or 50 percent profit. So in Waikīkī, just a few shops that were carrying drugs and toiletries in the hotels. If they buy them for one dollar, they sell them for two dollars. They were taking 50 percent profit. So, that's all they were doing because they had to buy from McKesson. We had the drugstores, we were able to buy at a better price. But at the same time, we figured, well, at the discount, they're making 50 percent gross profit, we going to sell them at our regular 33-1/3 and that's a discount. So we still were making 33-1/3 percent profit on it, yet at the discount price. All these other guys, small ones there, they had to go through McKesson and they had to pay a higher price. We were able to [buy in] bulk and everything, and yet we selling at a full price. Yet the full price was way cheaper than the hotel prices. Even right now [while visiting] New York. I had a cut so I had to buy Band-Aid. They were selling a thirty-nine-cents pack for seventy-nine cents.

(Laughter)

SK: That's why, most of the hotels, they sell, but it was just a matter of accommodation. So most of the tourists, they're smart now, so they always go to ABC Stores.

WN: So in the early days especially, the competition was the hotels, little sundries stores.

SK: Yeah.

WN: Not other stores?

SK: No, no. There were no—even now, there's no drugstore in Waikīkī except for one. So we started out with health and beauty. So that's why they say "ABC Discount Drug Store" first. So they still think of us as a drugstore. ABC Drug Store, you know, since we carry lot of drugs and cosmetics. And of course, we carry groceries and fast foods. Now, we carry everything.

MK: I was wondering, how did you come up with the name "ABC"?

SK: Well, that's the thing. I visited through Miami like that. And there was one Kenneth Lum, I remember. Oh, there was a Stewart's Pharmacy in Waikiki at that time. Kenny Lum had a smaller sundries shop. He called it "Kama'aina Drugs." Minnie and I thought, "The tourists, they come from the Mainland and from Japan, they cannot remember the Hawaiian name or anything, so why don't we pick up an easy name so that anybody can remember." So that's why we picked up ABC. We had to register, too.

WN: What about Thrifty? You weren't allowed to go with Thrifty?

SK: No, the late Masaji Marumoto, he was an attorney and a judge. He was in private practice at that time. So we were using him as our attorney. We asked him about using the name "Thrifty." So he wrote to New York, I guess, find out from the trade—trade name thing, see. He got the answer back. He said that as long as it's not a name of an individual or name of a person, and if it's a common name like "economy," "payless," and "thrifty," like that, it's kind of a generic name. He said, "As long as they don't do business in your state, you can use the name." So that's how, although they had Thrifty, L.A., they didn't do any business in Hawai'i. So we were able to use the name. In fact, there was a drugstore on King Street right near the Hawaiian Electric [Company], Harold Hayashi, he named his drugstore, "Payless Drug Store" at that time before this Payless [drug store chain] and everything came out.

WN: What about naming ABC Stores "Thrifty"? Did that come about? Could you . . .

SK: That's why we had to register it as "ABC" with our logo. With the ABC logo, we registered that. So that nobody can copy the ABC logo. But you cannot stop a guy from using "ABC." We had it registered. He cannot use "ABC Drugs," but anybody can call it "ABC Laundry" or clothing shop or something. But we registered the logo. We had a good attorney, too, Martin Hsia. He's one of the top in Hawai'i.

WN: But you never thought of naming the ABC Stores "Thrifty"?

SK: No.

WN: How come?

SK: No, because as I say, we wanted to find an easy name. Even the Japanese would have a hard time remembering "Thrifty."

WN: I was wondering, though, in 1965, tourists were mostly from the [U.S.] Mainland?

SK: Yes, mostly from the Mainland. Slowly, the Japanese were coming. They had Japanese signs, but it was a funny thing. They had Japanese signs all over the place, but no Japanese came to Hawai'i. You know, at the toilet like that, they had all these things, but no Japanese at that time. It started about after statehood, then slowly the Japanese came. We were wondering when the Japanese going to start coming.

MK: You know, earlier, you mentioned that your ABC Stores had some groceries. What kind of groceries?

SK: Well, when we say "groceries," we had a few canned goods, but we carried lot of the prepared food. Then the frozen foods start coming out, too. So we carried lot of the frozen foods, like TV dinners, like that. Those are the stuff we carried. And we carried Oscar Mayer meat, and bread, so that they could make their own sandwiches, like that.

But we didn't carry any fresh meat. Even the vegetables was very limited. We carried few lettuces, carrots, onions, potatoes, a few. But nothing like a market. Even right now, we don't. It's a matter of convenience. And more so now, we're getting more into the prepared food. Already, sandwiches are made. Like *bentō*, *musubi*, like that. We sell a lot of that. But when it comes to hard groceries, hardly anything. Of course, we carry like catsup, and *shōyu*, and those convenience stuff, but otherwise, very limited. Even Campbell's soup, like that, very limited. Because most of the tourists, they like prepared food. Now, more so. That's why, Cup-of-Noodles, like that.

MK: I guess, too, with the invention of the microwave . . .

SK: That's another one, with the microwave.

MK: . . . kind of changed the convenience . . .

SK: All their food, they buy. That's why, the frozen food, they put in a microwave. We even have microwave in our store, so like pizza, like that.

MK: And then, at your ABC Stores, where did you get all your goods? Again from a national buying group?

SK: Right now, of course, Fleming [Companies, Inc.] that sells to all the supermarkets, we buy from them. We used to buy from Hawaiian Groceries, too. And of course, like the prepared food, we buy [directly] from those companies that make those foods. But like milk and bread like that, Holsum, Meadow Gold, there are still some sellers around, too. And we sell lot of them, too. Way more than the small *mama-san*, *papa-san* kind of grocery stores.

MK: You were mentioning that in the early days, most of the customers were Mainland tourists. How did you folks try to attract people to the stores?

SK: As I say, we started with the health and beauty. So if they want aspirin, or they want [something for] upset stomach, we all had those things. So that was part of them coming in. And then, they want to get soft drinks, gum, candy, like that. So it's a matter of convenience. All the other shops are either [carrying] T-shirts, or *aloha* shirts, curios, but nobody carries food items.

MK: So to what extent does ABC Stores rely on advertising?

SK: Not too much. We built a good reputation on word-of-mouth. So once the tourists go to Hawai'i, they see ABC Store give them good service, they go back, they tell the friend, "When you go to Hawai'i, you shop in ABC." That's how we built a reputation that we give them good service.

WN: I was wondering, did any of the hotels, were they not happy with you folks competing?

SK: Well, at the start, some of the tenants in the hotel shops complained, but we were outside. We weren't in a hotel. But when we got some shops in the hotels, not right inside, but right on the grounds, the amount of business we do, they're so amazed. They said they want to have an ABC Store. In fact, I remember this guy, Hawaiian guy, he was with Sheraton. What's his name? He retired, but he was a manger for Princess K[a'iulani Hotel]. He tell me, "Sidney, you make my job easy. Because all the revenue they collect, I don't have to worry about the budget because you help me bring the income to the

Like [Chris] Hemmeter was one of the first ones, he opened a hotel, but he put lot of shops around. Of course, we pay through the nose, the rent. But still yet, it's a convenience for their customers.

WN: Was Hemmeter the first to have outside concessions in the hotels?

SK: In fact, he owned most of them, right inside the Hemmeter hotels. Three [ABC] Stores we have at Hemmeter [hotels]. We bought it from him. Because he overexpanded and all of that, and finally got financial troubles.

WN: Okay. Well, you know, your first store was in '65. And then I was looking, in ten years, 1975, you went from one store to eleven stores. Were these all in Waikīkī?

SK: Waikīkī, yes.

WN: So what kind of philosophy, I mean, most times when you think you're going to put in a store, that's one area and that's it. How did you come up with the idea of putting many stores in one area?

SK: I had my experience from the chain drug operation, so I knew how to operate chain drugstores. You train the manager and teach him how to do it and you got a system, rules and regulations, company policies, everything. We had everybody follow that thing. We all teach and train all the people on how to operate a store. So all our managers, they came up from the ranks. We hire them as stock clerks and they moved up. As we opened the stores, they got promoted. They got to be the manager. So all the managers, at one time, they were assistant managers or something. When we opened up, then we looked at a good assistant manager and made him the manager. But trained him.

Next month, we're going to open up, finally, in Las Vegas. But [the manager] spent quite a bit of time in the [main] office. Because he had to know all the financial things, and all the state regulations. Once he went to Vegas, he got to go meet with all the [people] and get all the licenses. So we had to teach him over here, all the ropes. So now he's familiar. He's over there, but he's comfortable because we taught him all the stuff. We got quite a few of our own employees all want to go to Vegas. So the core is all well-trained people, so we feel that store is going to be a good one. Service is going to be good because they're all trained to offer good service and carry the merchandise they're familiar with.

MK: We've noticed that, say, in Waikīkī, you have many ABC Stores. And some of them are real close to each other. Why did you do that? You know, so many and so close.

SK: Well, some of them, by force because we had to close up because of the hotels coming up right around there. We had to close up, but there was one location right next to the same store. Well, let's transfer over there. Then when the hotel came up, they want us to come back. So that's why we came back again, but we kept this other store. So that's how, lot of them. Because at that time, as I said, lot of the development came up. We had little shops around, but when the hotels came up, all the shops around there all had to close up. And when the hotel opened up, they had spaces available. So they asked us or we asked them. It didn't affect us because it's a matter of convenience. Sometimes, they say, you don't want to go one block away to go shop in ABC Store if there's one right downstairs.

WN: Yeah. So wasn't that considered a risky move?

- SK: Well, we thought at the start, but it turned out that it helped us. It didn't affect the other [ABC Stores]. It might have cut the volume down little bit for a while, but eventually, they both picked up again.
- WN: With so many ABC Stores in an area of Waikīkī, is there a lot of competition between the stores? Your own ABC Stores?
- SK: Yes, but we're all one company. We take care of every manager. Because we know one store is little further away, he's not going to have much volume like this other store, but we make sure the manager is taken care of in bonuses and everything else. So we have good teamwork. So if one store is close by, but they need merchandise to take care of this customer who wants a dozen and they only have about six of something, they get it from this other store, bring them over and take care of their customer. Although many [ABC] Stores are around, it's good, competitive—they all want to do better than the other store, but they all help each other. Because we're all one family. We're all going to share in the profit, whether this store makes it or the other store makes it.
- MK: So the main thing is, it's still a one-business concept.
- SK: Oh, yes.
- MK: So, it's competitive, but they realize it's all one company.
- SK: Oh, yes. But like everybody has their pride. They rather do more sales than the other stores. Keen competition, but they're all friendly. That's why we always have meetings all the time.
- WN: So is location very important?
- SK: Oh, yes.
- WN: I mean, within Waikīkī?
- SK: Well, anyplace. Location is very, very important. Because if you have a good location, you're going to have traffic. But even how good an operator you are, if you're in a poor location and there's no traffic, I mean, how much are you going to do?

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

- WN: Okay. So a good location is one with a lot of traffic, foot traffic.
- SK: Oh, yes. In any business, location is very important.
- MK: Earlier, you mentioned that before, the tourists were mostly Mainland tourists. And then later on, the Japanese started coming in. As the Japanese started coming in, were there any changes in the goods that you folks provided?
- SK: Oh, yes. We start getting things that the Japanese tourists want. They want better quality T-shirts and better quality [merchandise in general]. Like the west-bound, we call them,

they're not as quality-conscious as the Japanese, so maybe something cheaper, they would buy. But we upgraded our merchandise quite a bit because of the Japanese tourists. They don't like junks. (MK and WN laugh.) They only want good things, so we want to make sure that what we have is good-quality merchandise. Like the west-bound, they like trinkets, and small kind stuff.

MK: I know with Japanese tourists, they have the custom of *omiyage*.

SK: Yes, that's the reason why you got to have good merchandise and quality. Parker pen like that. Gee, forty or fifty dollars, and they buy three or four at one time. Because they're going to give to their top echelons or whatever it is as *omiyage*. They don't want to give (inexpensive) stuff.

MK: How about the food items that you folks would sell? With the Japanese tourists, do you emphasize certain types of things?

SK: Yes. Because I used to go to Japan every year with a golf group. We used to go to all different golf courses all over Japan, all the way from Hokkaido way down to Kagoshima side. Even the bus that we go to from one place, on the way you stop at a rest stop. They all have Japanese food. I found out that the *musubi*, like that, they like that best. So we start stocking *musubi* in our stores. The only thing we haven't done too much about it is with tea, but we got tea bag and everything for them so they can always go back in the hotel and get hot water. But otherwise, to save money, too, they like *musubi*. Like everybody else, *musubi* with *ume* or with tuna, whatever. It's tasty, anyway, it's all wrapped up with *nori*. We sell a lot of that. And of course, they buy sandwiches, too.

MK: I think also you mentioned how you promote people from within your staff. You train them and then you promote them to higher positions. In all the years that you've had ABC Stores, who are some of the key people that have made ABC the success it is.

SK: That's why we have four supervisors. We have three buyers. We have of merchandisers. All of them came up the ranks. They were store managers. So from store managers, they became district managers, and then they became buyers. So that's why it's a good combination because they came from the store level, so they know the operation. They've been store managers, so they know what the store managers need. So when they become supervisors, they're all experienced. So all our workers, nobody is from the outside. Everybody knows the business. As I said, the good ones, we promote them to be buyers and supervisors. They're in charge of many stores, so many managers they oversee. Each store manager is the manager of the store, we assist them if they have problems, how they can do a better job. It's like a coach, that's all they do. That makes it easier to open stores because you've got them well trained. That's why, we opened in Guam, Saipan; we don't worry, because they've all been well trained. So when they go to Saipan or they go to Vegas, like that, we don't worry because they came from Hawai'i through our system.

WN: What do you look for in a potential manager?

SK: The first thing, you got to have that loyalty to the company. Then they got to be able to communicate with their employees. They got to have the feeling of taking care of the customers, too, and the employees. Most all are good managers because we train them right. You treat your employees well, they're going to treat the customers well. In turn, the company going to take care of you, too. That's why, everybody try to help each other.

- WN: So you're not just looking at the A student in a businessperson?
- SK: No, no. He's an A student, but if he doesn't have personality and strictly paperwork, we tell him, "You're not in the retail business. You better in accounting or something else, some other business where you really don't have to meet the people." Most of our managers are friendly.
- MK: We were wondering, over the years, were there any times when the stores were really having a hard time?
- SK: Oh yes. Plenty times. That's why I tell all the managers, with less tourists, we got to tighten our belt. You got to control your expenses. You got to control your labor. Some managers work from eight o'clock to about nine o'clock at night, just to save labor. They cannot afford to have another assistant or anyone else, so they run it by themselves. Lots of times we had to borrow money from the bank to pay for the merchandise, we were able to pay the bank back (when we made back the money). Like everything else, it's a successful store, but we went through a lot of hard times.
- We know some vendors, too, that's why we don't forget. That's why, all the good vendors, we give them (our business). But some vendors, they say, "If you don't pay within ninety days, we're going to cut you off," this and that. Gave us a rough time. But most of the (vendors know we're) tight on cash, and we are not going to pay back in full. We always pay them partially, but at least we didn't ignore them. When we had hard time, they all worked with us, too. "We know you having hard time." But there was one or two that demanded. We have to pay them off, so we never forgot them.
- WN: How much leeway does a manager have for their own store? I mean, how much authority do they have in terms of hiring and so forth?
- SK: Usually, they make the recommendations, but we have, right here, a human resources department. From the store level, they say there's a good potential one so they send him up (to Human Resources). We give him all the information, train him, and then send him back to the stores. But overall, a store manager is responsible for the profit of the store.
- MK: If we were to walk into one ABC Store, and then we go to another ABC store, and go to another one, will they be exactly alike?
- SK: They will be pretty similar because a lot of the times, we send the associate to help the other store. Because they're tight or shorthanded that they need help, so we send them over there. Of course, that's why lot of the stores are close together, but they usually stay at one store. But if they need help, they send the associate (to the other store) and the other store manager appreciates it.
- MK: So the way a store is operated and the goods that they sell would be about the same?
- SK: Oh yes. Everything got to be the same price otherwise, the customers will complain. So we have a price list and stock control card. And now that we have computers, everything goes through the POS [Point-of-Sale system] so we know exactly what sells and what don't sell.
- WN: The reason why I ask is because you said earlier that if a manager doesn't want to hire another person, they can choose to work longer hours.

- SK: No, it's not that. They just want to save labor. Because we always analyze what your labor percentage, how much it is. So the store manager, when his sales are down, he knows his labor cost is going to go up so what he does is, send the associate home earlier, so he stayed longer so they save on the labor.
- WN: But that's the manager's decision?
- SK: Yes. Yet if the manager don't do it, then we ask, "How come your sales are down and you're still using the same amount of labor?" So the supervisor goes around and finds out why (the manager is not controlling labor cost).
- WN: What about store hours? Is that set chain-wide?
- SK: Yes, we opened up (from 7 A.M. to) about one o'clock in the morning. But now, we close up about eleven o'clock because of less tourists. (Some stores are) opening up a little later, but normally, all the stores open till about one o'clock in the morning. Twelve o'clock or one o'clock. Not every store, but the busier stores out on Kalākaua [Avenue] side, they open because tourists go shop around there till about one o'clock in the morning.
- WN: But it's up to the manager whether they want to open up until one o'clock or not?
- SK: No. It's set schedule. Only now, we say you close up at certain time. But we tell the managers, if the customers are still around, stay open. And in the morning, if they're waiting outside, you open up.
- WN: Are there any ABC Stores that are not in a tourist area?
- SK: Yes, the only one is our ABC Store in Ala Moana Shopping Center. The rest is all within the tourist area.
- WN: Now, the store at Ala Moana, is that any different in terms of merchandise?
- SK: No, the only thing, we don't carry groceries. That's about all. But Ala Moana, too, carries most of the things because the tourist goes over there. We're surprised a lot of times, they buy (at Ala Moana store and) bring them back to the hotel. But we deliver to the hotel, too.
- WN: Oh, you do?
- SK: We pack and deliver.
- WN: All stores?
- SK: Most of the stores. So that's a convenience for the tourists.
- MK: That's a service, yeah?
- SK: Mostly to the Japanese tourists. We pack them so that they could (take them home to Japan). We don't deliver to the airport, but we take it to the hotel.
- MK: I'm curious, has ABC Stores gotten into Internet sales?

- SK: Yes. We have our catalog department. They take in all the orders.
- MK: How long ago did you start that up, that sort of catalog sales?
- SK: About four, five years ago. We're one of the earlier ones.
- MK: So you've expanded that way, too, then? Not just opening up a store, but. . . .
- SK: Oh yes, in that one, too.
- MK: Warren, you noticed within one period of time, there was a huge jump.
- WN: I was looking at the growth of ABC Stores, and again, from '65 to '75, you went from one store to eleven stores. And then from '75 to '80, you went from eleven to twenty-one stores. So there was some more jump. And then from 1980 to '85, you went from twenty-sixty stores. So what was happening between 1985 and 2001?
- SK: That's when we opened up in Guam, and we opened up in Saipan. So that opened up. Then we opened up in Maui and Kaua'i. That's how we expanded a little faster.
- WN: So how did that decision come about, to expand outside of O'ahu?
- SK: Well, because they had the hotels and shopping centers come out around there, we got into those hotels. If not, we're looking around the strip, right close to the hotels so that with the location, we can pick them up. So we always looking out for location, different places. Even now, if some good location opens up. That's why we're going to open up at least two in Vegas. But we have about three to open up. But I say, wait till—open up the first one first. Already, two, we signed the lease. We get the other ones, but open up this first and get everything before we move too fast.
- MK: But how did you get involved in, say, like Guam and Saipan? They're physically so far away.
- SK: But that's why we have real estate agents. Different guys from different places. From here we get to know the real estate people in the other areas, so through word-of-mouth we get to meet them and get to know them. Then we send our boys over there. They take a look at the location, and everything, and if it's good then [we open]. There's a few locations I haven't—as I say, Guam and Saipan, I haven't been there so I don't know. But I know they're doing good because the sales are good.
- WN: So what is the philosophy of those stores? Here in Waikīkī you sell things like souvenirs and tourist things. In Guam, do you sell Hawai'i things?
- SK: No, we sell Guam things. Even like Vegas, we got cups and everything already, Las Vegas on it already. T-shirts, and all that, we get all Las Vegas already. Guam, we have Guam. We make the same thing, but only the destination, you know, so that they say they've been to Saipan, they've been to Guam, so by buying those T-shirts and everything. And yet, like Hawaiian Host things, a lot of them, even in Guam, it sells. But we have candy from Guam and those other brands there, too, but we still sell. Hawaiian Host has been pretty good. Macadamia nuts.
- WN: And the Las Vegas stores, there's a lot of Hawai'i people who go to Las Vegas, do you tap that as a potential market, too?

- SK: Because we're going to be—the first store is going right near California Hotel.
- WN: What can you sell there that will get Hawai'i people in there to bring back?
- SK: Well, like the beverages, the fast food. Hawaiian kind of food. Mostly the local guys go there, so we know. Of course, going to be a lot of Las Vegas, too, what we going to sell there. It's right near California Hotel, too. To me, it should be a good store.
- WN: I think so. (Chuckles)
- MK: (Chuckles) So funny.
- SK: They all ask me, "When you going to open up?" We always got delayed, one thing or another. A lot of them have seen the location already. It's a good location. But, "Hey, you've still got it boarded up yet."
- MK: So that ABC Store in Las Vegas will have things like beef jerky or pistachio nuts?
- SK: Pistachio nuts, everything. A lot of the stuff is what's made on the Mainland.
- WN: I was wondering, with all the opening, the expansion, I'm sure there are some stores you had to close.
- SK: No, fortunately, we haven't closed any stores. We haven't closed as yet. We closed our Thrifty Stores. But aside from that, we haven't closed any ABC Stores.
- MK: So it's been constant expansion then? You never had to drop one, and then add two?
- SK: No, it comes to a time, if you find another bigger, better location with more potential, we might close the other one up. But so far, once we open up a store, if the other store still holds its own, we won't close, we'll keep it open.
- WN: But is there a philosophy of some stores not doing so well so we have to put energy and things into the higher-selling ones to sort of subsidize the less?
- SK: No, no. We treat each store exactly the same. But if it ever comes to a point where this store is not making a profit, then if we ever close it, we transfer all the staff to another store.
- WN: That's incredible. (Chuckles)
- SK: No, I think it's just logical. No sense close the store if this other store still making money.
- WN: True. (Chuckles)
- MK: We were in Waikīkī the other weekend, and we were just amazed at how many ABC Stores there were. We just walked along Kalākaua, went to the International Marketplace, and your stores are all over the place.
- SK: We have one in International Marketplace, too.
- WN: Now, this Mister K Liquor [and Sundries] Shops, how did that come about?

SK: Well, because the landlord says, "Hey, we don't want another ABC Store." So to please him, we said, "Well, okay, we'll call it Mister K." But it's only a camouflage because all the merchandise is the same, the bag [to pack the merchandise] is the same.

(Laughter)

So the landlords, they don't care. But at the start, they were worried about it. But when they see the sales are up there, it doesn't bother. So actually, it's just a name only because the inside content is exactly the same. Even the bags they put [the merchandise] in is ABC bag going out, so.

(Laughter)

That's why the customers, they know it's an ABC Store. But only the name [differs].

WN: I'm wondering, were there people in your field or any of your colleagues to caution you against this expansion?

SK: No. The only one I know was—he passed away—Masayuki Tokioka. He's with Island Insurance. He's a family friend, too. And my brother used to work for Island Insurance, too. But when we had the downtown store, it was right near International Savings and Loan, too. So Tokioka tells me, "It's all right. You open up the store but you make sure you get a strong base before you start opening up any more stores. Make sure, don't go just open up and don't have a strong foundation." I still remember that though. So if I open up, I make sure that all the existing stores are solid before we go into—if cannot, I say no. We wait. Just like Vegas. We wait until we get that first store set up right.

WN: Do people come up to you and say, "Gee, there's too many," or anything like that? Is there a bad thing?

SK: No. They don't say, "How come you got so much stores around?" (Laughs)

As I say, we work very closely with the vendor so the vendors, they service our store very well. That's one thing we tell them. We tell all the managers, "You treat the vendors like you treat the customer because they're going to help you." Some stores—I won't say all the stores, but some—I know the salesmen go around and say, oh, they don't want to go service that store "because the manager, they treat us like dirt." We hear, quite a few, some other stores. They tell the managers they don't like to go to the store because the way they treat us. That's one thing, we insist. Whenever they complain, sure, we sure get after the manager.

MK: I know you're going to be expanding to Las Vegas pretty soon. Next month it'll be opening up and two more after that. What do you see in the future for ABC Stores?

SK: We feel there's lots of opportunity because we're going to, as I say, Las Vegas is our first Mainland store. But once we start going there, we might go into Miami, wherever we feel that [there's a market]—where there are tourists around—we feel we can do, I wouldn't say can do better, but we can do just as well as anybody else around, any other chain-drug[store]. So we have all the confidence, we can, whether it's Longs or anything. Even Longs. It doesn't bother us. We run our own business.

MK: And then your business started as a family business. First your parents, then you. What do you see in terms of continuity?

SK: Oh yes, my son [Paul Kosasa] is the president now. Like everything else, we came from a small family. We don't have too many relatives. Even my family, our older [son, Thomas Kosasa], he's a M.D. so he's out, and the other daughter, she keeps the books for my son. The other [Gloria Kosasa Gainsley] is a clinical pharmacist at Kapi'olani [Medical Center for Women and Children]. So although they are part of the business, they're on the board [of directors]. Paul is the only one, I think. But we don't depend only on our own family, we depend on outsiders. I mean, we do develop good managers and they're the ones that are going to be running the stores, too.

WN: Should we stop here and come one more time, and we can talk about family and community? Would that be all right if we come back one more time and talk about family, talk about your community involvement.

SK: Okay.

MK: All the charitable things you got involved in.

WN: Would that be all right?

SK: Yes, that'd be all right.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 37-11-7-01

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sidney Kosasa (SK)

Honolulu, Hawai'i

November 1, 2001

BY: Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

MK: So I was saying earlier that today we wanted to ask you questions about your family. We were wondering because you've been so busy with your businesses, what was your role in your family life?

SK: Well, actually, my wife kind of handled all the family affairs most of the time. Of course, because when the kids are growing up, usually the mother takes care of all the activities. Although we had Boy Scouts, I used to just kind of participate in the Boy Scouts. But most of the time, my wife used to take care. My children were pretty independent too, so they went to all the functions by themselves. They didn't have to have their parents take them to those things. They were pretty good on that point. Unless it's a parent-teacher meeting or something, where we have to go. But otherwise, my wife raised them, and she worked at the same time, too. We had a house[keeper] come in about once a week to kind of clean the house, but aside from that, our children were pretty independent. They went to school on the bus themselves, even Paul, the youngest one. He went to 'Iolani [School], but from 'Iolani, after school, then he goes to my mother's place on 10th Avenue. So he gets off over there. Then he take the bus back home. So most of our children were pretty independent. We never did take them to any places, they went on their own.

MK: And you were saying Minnie was involved in the business, too, she was working. Over the years, what were her responsibilities with the business?

SK: She took care all the paperwork—all the accounting, and accounts payable. We couldn't afford an accountant either at that time, so she was keeping all the books together, payroll, and everything. Of course we had assistants, but that was her main role. Even today, she just kind of watches over, make sure that we don't waste any cash. She played a major role, and that's why she can handle all the financial side.

WN: Who was in charge of the long-range planning for the business? Who was the one who decided to expand?

SK: I always had the intention, when there's opportunities open, to [take them]. Of course, she and I decided on it. She usually supports me on it. But certain areas, she says, "No, I don't think we should do it." (Chuckles) We missed out on couple of good ones. But we don't have any really long plans, all we're doing is, when there's a location available, we decide whether we should take it or not. So, like the latest one in couple weeks we'll open in Vegas anyway, but then we have another one, signed a lease already in the

shopping center, too, in Vegas. So whenever the opportunity comes, then we decide whether we should take it or not. There's another [location], right there on the Strip, but as I said, wait until we open the first one, then get the second one before we jump into the third one. We know better, the operations in Vegas. Otherwise, no sense open all those and find ourselves in all kinds of problems. Our plans are, whenever there's opportunity, we open up. But we won't open up anyplace unless we feel comfortable that's it's going to be a profitable operation. Right now, with the downturn in the tourists, we're looking at a couple of our locations that we might close if we have to. We haven't closed it yet, but some of the locations we feel that the volume is not there and maybe it's better for us to close it then, instead of keeping it open. We don't have any major plans on how many stores we're going to open this year or next year.

MK: You know, your stores, do they sit mostly on leasehold land or do you buy the land?

SK: All depends on certain locations. We cannot buy because it's controlled by the hotels or by the shopping center, like that. If we were going shopping center, we have to go on a lease by the landlord. But on the Strip or wherever on the freestanding kind [of location], if there's a good location, we'd rather buy. We buy land, that way at least we save on all the other expenses involved. We have quite a few properties that we own. The one in Vegas, we own the property, too.

MK: Earlier you mentioned that there were some opportunities, some good ones, that you folks kind of missed. Would you say that Minnie is more conservative than you are?

SK: Yes, I think so. I think she's a little bit more—to be sure, she said, not to expand too fast. Overall, we've been on the right track. Actually, we haven't closed any locations yet.

WN: Minnie is the more cautious one. What about Paul, your son, where does he stand? Is he as cautious?

SK: Well, he's learning the business from us, so he's taking, more or less, what we guide him to. He's good at that. He's getting involved more and more into the community activities, participating. We're getting exposure, so I think we should participate, so he's in all kinds of different organizations. Takes up a lot of time, too.

WN: (Chuckles) You mean community service-type organizations?

SK: Yes. That way, too, he gets in contact with different people and that way, opportunity opens, he knows.

MK: I notice that in the ABC Stores business, that it's a very expansionary business, you know, always kind of growing. And yet in Hawai'i there are many businesses that don't grow. They open one store and just stay with one store, but you've always been kind of growing. Why is that?

SK: As I say, it's just an opportunity. A lot of people are very conservative, they don't want to expand any more than what they have right now. You have to have the knowledge or whatever it is to be able to expand. Then you got to have a good company policy, rules and regulations. Everybody got to follow all those rules and regulations and adhere to the company policy, so we're very strict on that. But at the same time, we know that we have to take care of our employees, so you pay them well and give them part of the profits of the company. So you give them all kinds of incentives to grow with the company.

To be able to grow then, that's an opportunity for the assistant manager who wants to be a manager. That's how we keep the good assistants of today, eventually they figure they'll be a manager once another store opens up. It's a planning stage that you got to have; otherwise, you cannot just open up a store like that unless you have good, solid foundation, and that's not easy to do. That's why we have district managers, too. They're in charge of so many stores, so they help supervise. They help the managers. In other words, their job is to help the managers get more business for their store.

MK: Earlier you mentioned your son Paul is getting more and more involved in community organizations and community service. We noticed in your biographical information, you've been involved in a lot of different organizations. What motivated you to become so involved in the community?

SK: Well, actually because as a business exposure they want you to participate in different functions. Right now, of course, we have my son, so he can participate. But at that time I was the only one so I was kind of forced into it. But fortunately, I had my wife watching the [business]. I had good managers that ran the store, so I felt comfortable. And also, by belonging to different organizations you make all kinds of contacts, too. Get to meet all the different people. You join, and naturally you got to participate.

MK: A lot of meetings.

SK: A lot of meetings, yes. (MK and WN chuckle.)

MK: I noticed like, you were on the board of Central Pacific Bank, Hawai'i Visitors Bureau, Hawai'i State Board of Health, Chamber of Commerce, Boy Scouts [of America], UH [University of Hawai'i] Foundation.

SK: All of those. Of course, that was at different periods of time. They're not all at one time. But they asked me to serve on different boards, so then I served on them. Of course, the biggest one that I served on was the Kuakini Foundation. That took up quite a bit of time, but it was a 15-million, 4-year program, so we had quite a few meetings that we had to do. Of course, Senator Dan Inouye, he's the honorary chairman of Kuakini [Foundation]. He came in and asked me to chair the drive, so I said well, I'll do it, provided I can have a co-chairman. Mr. Yoshiharu Satoh from Central Pacific Bank worked with me because he and I were in the bank together. He could take care of the Japan side, and I would try to take care of the Mainland and local. It worked out very well.

MK: And then Kuakini Foundation drive was for what purpose?

SK: That was for the building [i.e., Kuakini Medical Center]. All the new facilities in surgery and all. They upgraded the whole thing, and a lot of new equipment came in. The 15-million-dollar drive was also to help part of the Hale Pūlama Mau, and you got to improve all the facilities, too. I was on the board of Kuakini for over fifteen years. That's the time we built the new medical building, we built the Hale Pūlama Mau. When Kenji Goto (was administrator), I (was on the board). Then he got off, and Masa Tasaka took over, and then Gary Kajiwaru took over after that. I worked under three administrators at Kuakini.

WN: I noticed looking at your community involvement, it seems like you started out, you were with like the Retail Merchants of Hawai'i, Japanese Chamber of Commerce, Hawai'i Retail Druggists Association. So these were also related to your business.

- SK: Oh, yes.
- WN: It seems like as the years went on you were getting involved in things not directly related to your business.
- SK: First, you join your own drug (organization), then the Retail Merchants which became later on part of the Chamber of Commerce. So then, when I'm on the Retail Merchants, I got to be on the Chamber of Commerce board, too. Of course, being in Waikīkī too, they wanted me to serve on the Hawai'i Visitors Bureau, too. Then Kuakini Hospital needed board members, and that's how I start getting involved—one after another.
- WN: I noticed that when you are involved in these community groups, it's, more or less, serving the local population. I noticed your stores are pretty much tourist-oriented. I was wondering what kind of connection you see getting involved locally?
- SK: Because I had the drugstores, too. When I was on the board of pharmacy, that's with the drugstore. Originally being a pharmacist, too, I was kind of health conscious. When they asked me to be on the [State] Board of Health, I served.
- WN: ABC Drugs is pretty much exclusively in tourist areas.
- SK: But we had the drugstores too, so we were serving both sides.
- MK: Because your earlier businesses were more for the local trade, and ABC became more for the tourist-oriented, so you have your involvement in the Hawai'i Visitors Bureau.
- WN: Getting back to your family, your one son [Thomas] is a physician, another daughter (Susan, works for Thomas as an accountant. And another, Gloria), is a pharmacist. Paul is running the stores, and they're all sort of in this field of health. Is that by design or is that. . . .
- SK: No. I guess within the family, the oldest one said he's going to be a doctor. Then the second daughter got into accounting, business. And the third is a pharmacist. I told her, "If you don't want retail pharmacy, you get into the hospital type of pharmacy, medical side." Eventually, first, when she got out of Punahou [School] she went to [University of Michigan]. I told her, "You might as well take up pharmacy," which is a good field. So she became a pharmacist. Paul, the youngest one, graduated from 'Iolani [School]. He took up engineering and went to Michigan. Fortunately, he enjoyed the retail business, too. So when he graduated, I put him into—I had a friend who had about eight supermarkets in LA. So I told my friend, the owner, "How about hiring my son at least under apprentice to get a little bit knowledge about the supermarket business?" So when he graduated, he worked one year in the supermarket, learning the trade. Then when he came back, he joined us.
- MK: When your children were younger, when they were like high school or college age, during the summers, did any of them work for you, ABC Stores?
- SK: Yes. They all worked during the summertime, and weekends, too. They helped. Like even Tom, the oldest one, he worked in GEM for a while. The girls helped at Kaimukī Pharmacy. So they had business connections. I mean, they worked in the business.
- MK: When they started working for your company, what kind of instructions or what did you tell them? You know, you're going to start working for my company so . . .

SK: They got paid, but we treated them just like anybody else. I said, "You want to make sure that you work harder than the other employees do because, after all, if the son or daughter is lackadaisical, you're going to put a poor example on it." So they worked hard. Even Paul, right now, too. He got a good respect of all the managers and everybody else because he works hard and is always involved in the business. We were very fortunate.

Of course, my grandchildren are not involved yet. In fact, there's only one—oldest one—he already graduated from Punahou, then he went to Harvey Mudd [College]. That's an engineering school in California. After he graduated he's working for Sun Microsystems as a researcher. Because Harvey Mudd is a good engineering school, lot of research. Then the other one is going to University of Hawai'i, and one is still going to Punahou. Then Paul's side is one, Punahou, and one, 'Iolani. They're still small.

MK: Was there any reluctance on Paul's part to come into the business?

SK: I don't think so. I think he figured that somebody got to run the ABC Stores eventually, so he's the only one because the others are not involved. I mean, they're on the board, but they're not involved in the day-to-day operation.

WN: How important is it to you to have one of your children taking over?

SK: As far as Minnie and I are concerned, as long as he's qualified to do the job he'll be all right. But if he's not qualified, he better look for some other kind of a job and not get involved. We feel that for ABC to continue to grow, you got to have a good team that continues to run the company. So that's how we feel. Paul is fitting nicely into it, but we don't know what the future's going to hold. We're more interested in developing a good team, whether they're family members or outsiders. We give them shares in the company, too.

WN: We've been doing these interviews all these weeks and we've really enjoyed them. What we'd like to do is just sort of ask you a little bit about what things did you learn as you look through back in your life growing up in Pālolo, helping your parents at their store to now. Would you like to sort of look back and sort of reflect on your life a little bit?

SK: I give one of my biggest credits to my mother. She was a smart lady and a good businesswoman. Very, very good businesswoman. So I kind of learned the business operations working in the grocery store. One of the biggest things my mother taught us is to treat your employees well. Treat them well, so that then they'll produce for you. And she was real good in handling people. So, we feel, too, take care of them and give them an incentive to grow with the company. Not only monetary-wise, but prestige-wise, too. They could become managers. I feel all these years that took us, it's for my family and all my friends and everything else. They helped me. I had a lot of people that helped me in the business.

WN: What did you learn from your father?

SK: My father, well, I told you, he was a very strict, very religious fellow. He didn't say much, but he was a hard worker. He would've been a better contractor than a businessman. We have a few colleagues like that. But he could see anything that's not right with the building or something and he would call the contractor and say, "This is not right," or this and that. He was good with his hands. All the pipes around the house, sewer lines, all that, he installed it all himself. He was a good plumber, too. That's why

he spent a lot of time in the warehouse side, back side, filling up the stock and everything. But, he was a quiet fellow, that's why he was opposite of my mother. My mother always used to meet people, but he was quiet. So he just stayed in the background, but did all the work. (Chuckles) He did all the work.

WN: Do you feel that you're a combination of your mother and father or do you lean more toward one side?

SK: No, I think it's a combination of both. As I say, they were honest, honest people. My father never gambled, or never drank, or never played cards. Like the old days, the Japanese people around there, they played *shōgi* and all kinds. But my father was a very, very hard worker. Always working, always moving—out in the yard or whatever had to be fixed. He didn't say much, but he always pays his bills on time. He was a good Christian.

MK: We noticed, too, that your father and mother before the war, they donated land.

SK: Yes, they donated things. And they were among the first ones to become American citizens too, naturalized citizens. But my parents also sent money back to Japan to their relatives. They were humble. They never built any big house or anything. They lived in one of the regular cottages.

MK: So all their lives they lived in the same location?

SK: Yes, Pālolo. We built a few rental houses, and they lived in one of them, but spent most of the time in the store. They worked hard. And every Sunday they used to go to church, too. They were strong members of Nuʻuanu Congregational Church, so all the way from Pālolo Valley on Sundays, they used to go all the way to Nuʻuanu [Congregational] Church. I remember that. It took a half an hour more, maybe one hour, just to go to town.

MK: Did they expect you and your brother to be real religious, too?

SK: No, but my mother always said, "You got to go to church." My older brother, he was very religious. Unfortunately, he died right after the war, '51, so kind of young to die. He was working for National Mortgage, Island Insurance. That's why they were close to the Tokiokas because we're from the same prefecture.

Otherwise, as I say, my wife was my right-hand man because she took care of all the finances and everything. And, as parents, we never were too overpowering over—got to watch over the children.

So all our kids went to college. A lot of times the parents take them to the different schools to show them—but our children, they made their own plans to go whatever school they're going and they went ahead. I remember Gloria, the third one, she went to Michigan and she was to stay at the dorms, but the dorm wasn't ready for about three or four more days. So I don't know what she was going to do, but she made some friends and stayed with her friends, and then later on she moved into the dorms. She worked in the cafeteria, so that helped her expenses, too. Whereas the oldest one, he went to Dartmouth [College], that time, gee, they were real cheap. Only \$2,000 a year, or whatever. Anyway, it was room and board for the whole year, tuition, everything, \$2,000. The other one went to USC [University of Southern California]. The third one, Paul, went to Michigan, too.

At that time Gloria and Paul were at Michigan already, I was with this Affiliated Drug Store, so I used to have a meeting at West Palm Beach. On the way back we dropped by Detroit. I used to know the Walgreens people very good, so we used to come back together on the same plane. I noticed, even Walgreens as big as they were, all their executives, they all go by coach. Nobody go first-class. So we used to take the same plane. I had to go from West Palm Beach to Chicago, to Chicago to Detroit. Going to Chicago I sat with the Walgreens people. Walgreens has really changed, they're so big now. But even at that period they had about 500 stores. They were real friendly. They taught me a lot, too

WN: Plus, they were, I guess they were humble too. They sat in coach, you said.

(Laughter)

SK: Oh yes, coach. They never—I know some other chains, kind of bigwigs, but the Walgreens people were always very humble. A lot of dinner meetings, too, because I'm the only Oriental, I used to sit with them, too. They tell me, come and sit with them.

MK: I noticed that Minnie grew up on the Mainland. And in your opinion, did that make a difference that she was raised on the Mainland, familiar with Mainland ways, compared to what if you had a wife from Hawai'i that wasn't familiar with the Mainland, would that have made a difference?

SK: I don't think so because if you're familiar with the Mainland Japanese and everything, they just like a community. The Japanese stick together with the Japanese. The Chinese. They had their own community. The Japanese stuck close to the Japanese town like that. And that's why they have the JACL, we call it, Japanese American Citizens League. They have a Hawai'i chapter here, but that was very strong on the Mainland. That's the only organization because we didn't have any Japanese Chamber of Commerce like that in LA or anything like that in that period, at that time. So JACL was the only strong voice for the Japanese-Americans. But as far as whether they lived on the Mainland or Hawai'i, I don't think it made any difference.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

SK: . . . because Gloria went to the Mainland and married a *Haole* boy. Of course, the oldest one, he married a local, and Paul's wife is Chinese. So we don't have any kind of racial [preference] that they got to be married to Japanese or something. We have a lot of good *hakujin*, which you call Mainland *Haoles* here. Very good friends. That way, we feel more open. We're not strict, oh you got to be Japanese, you got to have Japanese manager, no. We feel that the best qualified. We had a lot of different nationality. As long as you have a good manager. They mix well with everybody, you know.

END OF INTERVIEW

**An Oral History
of
Sidney Kosasa**

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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